



THE LAWYER'S



DAUGHTER.





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THE LAWYER'S DAUGHTER.

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THE FOUR SCHOOLFELLOWS:

A *Novel*,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“THE SCHOOLMASTER OF ALTON,”

“LITTLE MISS FAIRFAX,” “ROKE’S WIFE,”

ETC., ETC.

THE LAWYER'S DAUGHTER :

A Novel,

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“BROKEN FETTERS,” “THE MARKED MAN,”
“THE GLADSTONES,” “AN OLD MAN’S SECRET.”

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THE LAWYER'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE Castle of Vigilio remained under the command of Captain Gondoli, thirty arquebusiers, and nearly fifty of the Duke's retainers, all well armed and trained. Many of the men had served in the armies of Venice in the recent contests in Friuli; and had returned home on the cessation of the war.

The Venetian provinces and towns looked as if the people were inclined to disturbances; and French agents were supposed to be scattered through the country, fomenting conspiracies against the Venetian Government.

A new governor had arrived at Brescia; and a Venetian officer at the head of two hundred men had immediately marched to invest the

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mountain retreat of the outlaws and brigands that infested the district. Forty-eight hours were allowed them to surrender and for those not connected with them to quit the mountains. After that time every man found within a certain proscribed district would be shot, without word or question.

Captain Henrico Gondoli, the commander of the Castle of Vigilio, kept a strict and severe discipline within its walls. He was at this period in his thirty-seventh year, tall and well made, more robust than graceful; his complexion extremely dark, and the expression of his features disagreeable. Originally of very low birth, his great ambition was to rise into a higher grade; and a chance service, whilst a petty officer in the arquebusiers, drew the attention of the Duke of Malamocco, while in Brescia, upon him. His countenance at once convinced Bertran de Trevisano that he was a man that might be useful to him. He had him promoted and stationed in Peschiera, and, after several interviews, found he might trust him with any kind of commission, his con-

science would not in the least degree interfere in the case.

Andrea Peretti, having fallen a victim to his own villainous schemes, Henrico Gondoli replaced him in the Duke's confidence ; and on the same night that the Duke had his conference with the Signora Coralli, a diabolical and cruel scheme of vengeance against his innocent and helpless captives was talked over and finally agreed upon by the two heartless confederates.

The apartments assigned to the Signora Coralli, her daughter and Leta, were situated in the western wing of the castle, whose base projected into the waters of the Lake of Garda ; they consisted of three chambers, a saloon and two bedrooms ; the Signora Coralli occupied one of the latter, and Justina and Leta the other, which faced the lake, commanding a magnificent prospect across its waters to the opposite shore, on whose banks stood the very picturesque town of Gavardo. The lake at this part was of considerable breadth, perhaps nine English miles, and when the

breeze blew from the westward the waves of the lake beat with considerable violence, and often fury, against the castle's base of the tower.

One morning, about three or four days after the departure of the Duke, Justina and Leta were both awake at daybreak; the night had been one of storm and tempest, and the waters of the lake as they dashed with terrible uproar against the base of the tower, kept the two fair girls from their slumber. The noise of the storm also, as it roared across the lofty tower, resembled thunder. Altogether it was a terrible night, and Justina, who greatly admired the lake, even in its stormy aspect, rose early to look out upon its storm-tossed surface.

"Do, Leta, go and see how mamma has passed the night. She gets quite nervous during a storm, and though her chamber is not exposed like ours to the gale, still she must have heard quite enough of it to keep her awake."

"It was a terrible night," said Leta, as she hurried her dressing. "I fancied I heard all

kinds of strange noises during the night. Bless me, what a fury the lake is in." So saying, she passed out into the saloon, and then knocked at a door at the farthest end, where the Signora Coralli slept. But no answer was returned. Rather surprised at her sleeping so soundly, Leta opened the door, and entered the room. The window blinds had not been closed, and, at a glance; she perceived the room was untenanted. For an instant she stood bewildered. She felt faint, and the blood forsook her cheek. Recovering a little her natural firmness before she alarmed Justina, Leta advanced into the room. The bed had not been lain on, but there were marks on the floor that showed the shuffling of feet, and the carpets were disarranged. There was another door in the chamber, leading she knew not where, and it must have been through that door the Signora Coralli had been taken. The door, however, was locked, and, no doubt, bolted outside.

Shocked and frightened, Leta scarcely knew what to do; still she must break the intelli-

gence of her mother's abduction to her beloved Justina; and the poor girl felt her heart beat painfully, as, with trembling steps, she retraced her way to their chamber.

The first glance Justina caught of Leta's features caused her to give a faint cry of alarm.

"Oh! Leta, what makes you look so pale? My mother! Anything the matter with her? Do not keep me in suspense."

"I am frightened, certainly," returned Leta, "and agitated, for I have not found your mother in her chamber; neither did she sleep there last night."

"Merciful Heaven! What can be the meaning of this fresh calamity?" exclaimed Justina, her hands clasped, and her beautiful eyes suffused with tears. "Who can have dared to remove my beloved mother; and for what? That vile Duke left the castle, you know, two days ago."

"Alas! I have no idea, dearest," said Leta, kissing the pale cheek of her friend, who sat the picture of despair, unable to leave her chair. "Do not give way, dear girl; they will bring

in breakfast presently, and that old dame who attends us, bad as she looks, will surely have some pity in her nature, and tell us why the Signora has been removed."

"I fear me there is some evil and wicked design in this," said Justina, rising. "But come, let us minutely examine mamma's chamber. How desolate and unprotected we now feel."

Vainly, however, did the bewildered and sorrowful maidens search the chamber; it afforded only one consolation, and that was that all her mother's clothing and dress were removed from the room. This satisfied them that no violence or ill-usage was intended. Perfectly miserable and dejected, they awaited impatiently the arrival of Dame Brighette with their morning meal.

At the usual hour, the door opened, and the old woman entered the chamber, looking infinitely more ill-tempered than usual. Placing their breakfast on the table, she replied to all the entreaties and tears of Justina, who implored her to say why her mother had been removed, and to where.

The simple sentence that her mother was well, and only for a time removed to another chamber; that in the evening she would receive a letter informing her of the reason of her removal, and with these words she left the room, carefully locking the door after her.

It was a melancholy day to the two fair girls in their lonely prison. They looked out on the stormy lake, foaming and lashing itself into wreaths of snow-white drift against the rocky base of the tower; a solitary bark, now and then, under easy sail flew past the castle, seeking the protection of the little pier erected for the security of the boats of the fishermen of Lazise.

“I wonder,” said Leta, as the shades of evening fell over the dark waters of the lake, now subsiding into a less angry mood, “I wonder if the Count St. Felix visited the cottage after we were taken from it; and if he did, did the words I contrived to write upon the white paint on the door catch his eye? Surely, if they did, we may expect some help. He is a noble cavalier, and a true friend, I am

convinced ;” and Leta’s large blue eyes sparkled for a moment with some inward thought or hope.

“Alas ! Leta, what could the Count do, alone and unassisted ? Just as I expected to gain some intelligence of the Marchese d’Obizzi, we were rudely torn from our home. Ah ! my poor mother has had nothing but trials and sorrows to contend against since my birth—but here comes the old dame. My heart beats with terrible anxiety.”

The door unlocked, Dame Brighette entered with their evening meal, and on the tray was a folded paper.

“Tell me, dame,” said Justina, placing her taper fingers upon the old woman’s arm, and gazing up into her crabbed features with a look from her soft, persuasive eyes—a look that only a very crabbed old woman could resist—“Tell me, dame, how fares my beloved mother ? Is she fretting after her poor Justina ?”

“Your mother is well enough, child. There is nothing done to her to make her ill. Read that,” pointing to the note, “make up your

mind to do what is there written, and you will not only rejoin your mother, but you will be restored to liberty ;” and so saying, Dame Brighette retired.

For several minutes, after the two friends were left to themselves, they continued to regard the letter before them as if it were some obnoxious animal. A feeling of dread began to creep into Justina’s heart ; and even Leta’s cheek grew pale and flushed by turns, as she allowed her eyes to rest on the mysterious paper before them.

At length Justina, mustering courage, raised the paper, and unfolded it ; held it for a moment to the light ; read a few lines ; and then, sinking back into her chair, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

“ Oh ! my beloved Justina, what is in that horrid letter to sadden you thus ? ” exclaimed Leta, throwing her arms round her friend’s neck, and soothing her with kind words and endearing caresses.

“ Dear Leta, read it. Better be dead than

live subject to—Oh, holy Virgin! is this man, this fiend, to be our persecutor for ever?”

Leta, amazed and bewildered, raised the paper, and read, with feelings of the greatest disgust and indignation, the following lines:—

“Only as the bride of Captain Henrico Gondoli can you ever again embrace your mother. Till you consent to this union, you remain separated. One week is given you to decide, whether you go to the altar a willing bride, or be taken there by force.

“BERTRAN DE TREVISANO,

“Duke of Malamocco.

“To Justina Coralli.”

“That man is a fiend,” exclaimed Leta, her eyes flashing with indignation, her whole form erect, her bosom swelling with all a woman’s pride and just resentment against cruelty and cowardly oppression. “You, Justina, the wife of that treacherous Venetian Captain, a miserable panderer to the Duke’s villainy—Never!” and throwing her arms around the

weeping Justina, and kissing her with all the fondness of a sister, whispered—

“Give not way to grief and despair ; we will defeat this bad man yet. Depend on it, the Count St. Felix will never desert us, and may be, even at this moment, anxiously seeking to release us.”

“I weep, dear Leta,” said Justina, “not from despair—for I firmly trust in Heaven for deliverance—but what my beloved mother must feel ; for depend on it, that vile man has, to torture her, told her of his infamous project. I the bride of that mean, cowardly Venetian—Never !” And the maiden’s eyes flashed with insulted pride and womanly feeling. “They may drag me to the altar, but wife of his I will never be—if I have to throw myself from yonder window into the lake below to avoid him,” and she buried her face in her hands, and remained thus several minutes.

While the two maidens were passing the day and devising and planning various schemes, Leta approached the casement, and in deep thought looked out upon the then quiet waters

of the lake. Sky and water were both of that remarkable deep, brilliant blue, for which the Lake of Garda is so celebrated. There was not a ripple on its surface, and, unlike the mighty ocean, which heaves and swells with a terrible commotion even after the storm that disturbed its serenity ceases, no deep roll on the lake testified that a few hours back its waters were driven by a furious gale; all was still and calm. Many light barks, with their sails of different colours flapping idly against their masts, were moving across it, their shadows reflected clearly and minutely. The distant woods of the Lazise shore were in deep shadow, but the sun sinking to its rest threw a flood of glorious light full upon the Castle of Vigilio.

As Leta gazed thoughtfully down upon the lake—she was forty feet above the surface—she observed a boat with four persons, just under the tower, hauling a net. This boat could be seen from the tower, which projected into the lake, and not from any other part of the edifice. Leta watched the proceedings of the

fishermen at first without any interest whatever ; but suddenly something attracted her particularly, for one of the men stood up in the bow of the boat, and raised his face towards the tower ; as he did so, Leta happened to fix her eyes upon him. Struck by the man's manner, she threw open the casement and put her head out, and looked keenly down ; the other three men were dragging in the net. The man Leta looked at stood by the mast as if hauling a rope, and caught sight of her head at once. As he did so, he pulled off his red tasselled cap, and bowed low, as if looking down into the boat, and then replaced his cap.

Leta's heart beat almost audibly, great as was the height, for she recognised the Count St. Felix in a moment, as he lifted his cap from his head. Snatching her kerchief off her neck, she waved it. Justina saw the action, and in great amazement ran to the window, saying anxiously—

“ Leta dear, what do you see ? ”

“ Help, my beloved Justina,” was the reply,

“is nearer than we thought, or could have hoped. In that boat is the Count St. Felix.”

Justina gazed out, her heart throbbing with intense emotion and joy. Her fair head was also extended from the window. As she gazed down, another of the fishermen, having hauled in the net, stood erect ; as he raised his cap, and wiped his brow, Justina uttered a cry of joy, and but for her friend would have fallen on the floor. Catching her in her arms, Leta placed her on a seat and gazed into her pale features with great anxiety, and in a minute or two she exclaimed—

“Leta, Leta, how thankful I am. I have seen him. He is alive, and so near us. That tall man is Ferdinando d’Obizzi. Go to the window, I cannot move a limb. If they should be seen from the castle, the men will fire upon them.”

Leta’s eyes sparkled with delight ; her cheek crimsoned with the feelings that agitated her ; but she ran to the window and then exclaimed—

“They are rowing further out, and quietly

casting their nets again. Come, Justina, joy and blessed hope ought to cheer your heart. Come to the window and let your lover see, even in the distance, that you are looking at him."

Trembling with emotion, Justina came to the window and gazed out, her eyes dimmed with tears; but her heart was beating with a pure and holy joy. The being she loved best in the world was before her. The boat was now further out and quite visible to any part of the castle; the features and persons of the fishermen completely undistinguishable, but their movements could be noted. They were again putting out their nets, and the two maidens watched them with intense interest, till they were startled by the sound of heavy footsteps in the saloon behind them. Turning round they beheld the person of Captain Henrico Gondoli entering the chamber.

Justina at first trembled, but instantly recovered herself. Leta's face flushed, and her glance fell upon the Venetian arquebusier as she closed the casement, with a look of ill-dis-

guised scorn. But Captain Gondoli was by no means a man to care one single atom about a maiden's looks, for though he perceived both his captives regarding him with fear and disgust, he very calmly bowed to the Signora Justina, and as quietly observed, he was glad to see that she enjoyed the prospect from the tower; though indeed the air was rather cold for gazing upon it from an open window; and then without any restraint of manner he took a chair and sat down.

The first impulse of the two girls was to retire to their sleeping apartment without heeding the presence of their visitor; but a little reflection convinced them of the inutility of such a proceeding, as escape from the persecution of his presence they could not. Therefore seating themselves as far from their jailor as they could, they waited in silence to hear from him the purport of his visit.

“You have doubtless, Signora,” said the Captain, turning his gaze upon Justina, “read the letter, left for your perusal, by my Lord

the Duke. I have not come to press for the completion of the Duke's command, contained in that letter ; on the contrary, my intention is to offer you your liberty, and the liberty of your mother on certain conditions."

The two girls looked each other in the face with a surprised and incredulous expression of features, but made no reply, though Captain Gondoli not only paused, but keenly regarded each, one after the other. Finding they remained silent, he resumed—

"As you do not seem, Signora, to heed my proposition, I will explain it fully to you. I am willing, Signora Coralli, to forego the honour of your hand, which the Duke insists on my receiving, on one condition, and that is, in your exerting your influence over this young lady," turning to the startled Leta, who gazed at him with her large, deep blue eyes, in utter amazement, while he looked at her in a manner that appeared to drive all the blood from her heart into her face and temples.

"Exert my influence to do what, Sir," in-

interrupted Justina, speaking slowly and calmly, "I do not understand you."

"You will understand me presently, Signora," resumed the Venetian with a rather sinister smile, rendering his repulsive countenance even more disagreeable. "The affair stands thus—I waive my claim on your hand, provided you induce this young female, Leta Cassalli, to become my wife."

"What!" exclaimed Leta, starting to her feet, her eyes flashing with indignation and passion. "Become your wife!" and she laughed in utter scorn as she advanced close to the table and steadily looked into the face of Captain Gondoli; stretching out her right hand, she placed it on the table, and slowly and distinctly said—

"Sooner than this hand should be held by you at the altar, I would hack it from the wrist, and glory in doing so, if I thought it would save me from the degradation of becoming your wife."

"I like your spirit, fair mistress," quietly in-

interrupted Gondoli, with a mocking laugh, "and I always admired your pretty face. I did not expect your willing consent, but I thought you had sufficient devotion in your nature to sacrifice yourself to save your friend. I call it no sacrifice for a peasant's daughter to bestow her hand on Henrico Gondoli."

"Man ! you are speaking falsely," exclaimed Leta, with scorn on her lip. "You know well I am no peasant's daughter ; though I do not understand your motive in this strange proposition of yours, yet well I know some deep deceit lies at the bottom of it. To save my beloved Justina from your power, I would sacrifice a dozen lives ; but to become your wife would be a greater sacrifice than a thousand deaths."

"Your scorn, fair lady, improves your beauty," said the Captain, not in the least disturbed by the words and manner of Leta. Rising from his chair, he continued—"I did not expect a willing bride, whether you or your fair friend became the object of my choice ; therefore I feel no disappointment. My wife

you shall be, willing or not willing. In the latter case, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you become my wife without restoring your friends to liberty. I now leave you till after to-morrow, giving you ample time for reflection ; hoping that you may in the meantime perceive the utility of avoiding compulsory measures, and in giving me that pretty hand save the friends you love ;” and with a very doubtful smile and a bow, the worthy commander left the chamber.

“This is past all comprehension,” exclaimed Leta, sinking into a seat beside her friend, who, bewildered and confounded, sat, with her hands clasped, staring at the chair which so lately held the incomprehensible Henrico Gondoli.

“The man is either mad, or some insane project has entered his brain. Make me his wife ! Holy Mother ! that is, in truth, a new feature in our persecution.”

“He has discovered something concerning your birth,” said Justina, recovering herself. “Something he fancies more hopeful than his scheme, or rather the Duke’s scheme, of forcing

me to the altar. Oh ! Leta, what a fate is ours."

"Be of good heart, my love," said Leta. "I am not frightened. No, there is no fear in my heart. That villain is playing some game of his own. He is a cowardly wretch, too ; I know it by his eyes."

"Well, only for my separation from my beloved mother," said Justina, "I should feel lighter in spirit. The miserable state of uncertainty I was in, with respect to Ferdinando d'Obizzi's fate, depressed and weighed upon my heart, and left me unable to rouse my natural courage to meet the cruel oppression we experience. Now, dear Leta, we will show this bad man that, though we are only two defenceless girls, we are not to be crushed and trampled on without a struggle."

"Oh ! carissima," returned Leta, with a cheerful smile, "how I rejoice to see your spirit return. No, with two such gallant cavaliers watching over our safety, we will defy the ruffian and all his vile schemes."

Leaving our fair and more hopeful captives to

their thoughts and reflections, we will, in our next chapter, explain the reasons and causes that led the worthy Captain Gondoli to venture upon thwarting the schemes and projects of a nobleman like the Duke of Malamocco.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN GONDOLI was not quite the man to be influenced by the power of love, far from it. The master passion of his heart was ambition; wealth next. In gratifying these, he had no objection to the addition of a pretty face and a fine figure; though if a female without any attractions in personal appearance had been offered to him, provided she advanced his position in life, he would, without the slightest hesitation, have preferred her as a wife to one possessing the most brilliant charms, if unpossessed of worldly goods.

In his interview with the Duke, he was amazingly astonished at that nobleman's proposal—that he should become the husband of the beautiful Justina. The Duke did not condescend to explain, or give him any reasons for wishing such a strange union. He merely said that Justina was, unquestionably, the only

daughter of the Marquis des Lesdiguières, formerly the well-known Balthazar Juven; that he had escaped to France, and had succeeded to a vast inheritance.

The Duke added to these explanations a promise to present Gondoli with five thousand ducats the day, after his marriage, as well as immediate promotion to a higher rank.

Now, to be married to a beautiful girl, the daughter of a Marquis, and to have five thousand ducats presented to him, and to be made Governor of some town, perhaps, were indeed tempting baits to a needy, low-born and most unprincipled adventurer. He therefore readily agreed to the proposal, and solemnly swore that, willing or not willing, Justina Coralli should become his wife.

Satisfied that Gondoli would fulfil his brutal scheme of vengeance against the Marchese d'Obizzi—a vengeance he considered infinitely greater than any other he could inflict on the man he detested—the Duke of Malamocco left, as related, the Castle of Vigilio, and proceeded to Venice, leaving Henrico Gondoli to consider

the best means of proceeding to carry out his employer's views.

That Justina would willingly become Gondoli's wife never once entered his brain, for vanity was not one of the worthy Captain's besetting sins. He had, however, half-a-dozen men in his troop on whom he could depend for executing any schemes of villainy, and at once determined to lose no time in fruitless efforts and endeavours to persuade the lady to so monstrous a sacrifice. His first act was to separate the mother and daughter, confining the former in another wing of the castle, and then sent the letter the Duke left with him to the unfortunate Justina, and having thus, as he fancied, cleared away some of the obstacles, he began to consider where he could get a priest whose conscience would not interfere with his views.

At length he remembered a Padre, well-known all through that part of the country as the "Wandering Friar," of whose life many strange stories were told. He belonged to a monastery of begging monks, near Peschiera,

but was never, or rarely at least, to be found in his monastery. He, however, paid it periodical visits, and contrived to pay into the hands of the treasurer of the monastery certain small sums that ensured him a continuance of his wandering life without restriction.

The Padre was by no means particular as to certain small offices he performed in the way of his priestly calling, provided he was sufficiently remunerated, and was given a trifle over the regular fees for the benefit of his monastery.

It was not always easy to find this useful man; though he was tolerably certain not to be further south than Peschiera, or further north than the town of San Giovanni; and never by any chance more than a league from the shores of the Lake of Garda.

Henrico Gondoli, having thought of this unscrupulous priest, despatched two of his men, one south and the other north, in quest of him. To his extreme surprise, the day after the departure of his emissaries, who should make his appearance at the gate of the Castle

of Vigilio but Padre Benedette himself, enquiring whether he could have an audience of his Excellency the Duke of Malamocco.

Captain Gondoli, delighted at this unexpected visit, ordered the monk to be admitted, and to be shown into a chamber, where he sat at a table covered with a profusion of eatables and drinkables. The half of a boar's head graced one end of the board, and a huge venison pasty the other; whilst a goodly array of flasks stood in the middle.

The worthy Captain knew well the character of the man he intended to be his guest. The door opened, and in waddled the Padre; we say waddled, for the monk had no other kind of gait, as, with the advance of years, he had grown amazingly stout and somewhat unwieldy in appearance, though not so in reality.

"Bless you, my son!" he exclaimed, entering the chamber, and depositing a large wallet he contrived to carry by a strong leather strap over his shoulder, behind the door, whilst a pleased smile stole over his rubicund countenance as his small, twinkling, but keen grey

eyes fell upon the good things on the table before him.

“You are welcome, Padre Benedette,” replied the Captain, gaily. “I am just going to feed, and before you open your lips about your business, sit ye down, and keep me company. Good food and good wine require good company to enjoy them. So bless the meat, and take your seat.”

The Padre spread his fat hands over the table, muttered a Latin benediction, and then, taking a seat, pulled a huge kind of napkin out of his capacious pocket, deliberately tucked it under his chin, and seizing a knife helped himself to an enormous slice of the boar's head, and then to an equally large amount of the venison pasty.

Captain Gondoli eyed the priest's platter with wonder, though by no means a bad trencherman himself ; then took a keen survey of the man he had often heard of, but never before seen.

The monk was at this period rather above sixty-three years of age, about five feet high,

and immensely corpulent : his head was very small, and without a solitary hair to disfigure its polished surface. His face, like his head, was round, and his chin and upper lip carefully shaved ; the eyes exceedingly small, the nose *retroussé*, singularly red and fiery at the end ; the lips large, full and sensual ; yet, taking this strange kind of visage altogether—though a large amount of cunning could be easily seen in its ordinary expression—on the whole it had an easy, good-humoured look ; so much so, that Captain Gondoli, as he scrutinized it, doubted if he was the kind of man he wanted.

“ My son,” observed the Padre, having made a wonderful inroad on the meat before him, “ your food is excellent, but highly seasoned. I do not see any of the pure liquid Nature has bestowed so bountifully in this district on your table.”

“ If it will not disagree with you, Padre,” answered Gondoli, with a smile, “ there is some excellent juice of the grapes grown on these hills, so famous for their fruit. Can you put up

with that, or shall I order a supply of that liquid you seem to prefer ? ”

“ By no means, my son,” observed the Padre, looking with a sigh at his empty plate, and stretching out his hand for a flask, “ thanks to our patron Saint Nicholas, I can accommodate my palate to any liquid. Water, my son, is refreshing and strengthening when in the vigour of youth ; age, at times, requires restoratives. I do not complain, indeed, of any bodily weakness, if I except a slight failing in my appetite, but, praise be to the Saints ! besides that I am well ; ” and, filling a goblet that held rather more than a pint, he emptied it at a draught, without at all requiring breath ; and putting it down, continued, “ and so my son, the good Duke has left this part of the country, and is gone to Venice ? ”

“ He has, Padre,” replied Captain Gondoli, pondering over in his mind how to commence proceedings ; “ is your business very urgent ? ”

“ No ; it will keep, my son. You perceive I am getting old, and rather stout,”

and he tried to look down at his limbs, but his capacious body rendered that feat somewhat difficult. "I wanted my Lord Duke to get me the post of parish priest to the little chapel of Lazise; the present worthy Padre is going to be made the Curé of San Giovanni—a good post, a very good post, my son. But what has become of the good Signora Coralli and her sweet lovely daughter? I was always well received at their cottage—though only twice I happened to pass that way. I also miss another of my little penitents; for, my son, I visit all the lads and lasses in this part of the country twice a year; and the children always remember Padre Benedette and fill his wallet; and I pick up here and there a few relics—the toe-nail of Saint Anthony, cut into small bits, goes a long way; some pieces of the true cross; a few hairs off Saint Agnes' head; a very small piece of the dress worn by the Blessed Virgin, cut into very small pieces; and other little things I search for—ah! but it's no use talking," and he filled his goblet again,

“for I must be moving. Your wine is good, and not too strong.”

“If it is,” thought Henrico Gondoli, “it seems to make no impression on your head—only loosens your tongue.”

“Sit here quiet, Padre,” said Gondoli, aloud, “I have something to say to you.”

“Speak without fear, my son,” said the Padre, one eye fixed upon the empty flask, while he winked slyly with the other, “you may say anything to old Benedette.”

“Well, then,” began Gondoli, “I wish to make a present to your monastery of four hundred ducats.”

“A blessed inspiration, my worthy son,” exclaimed the monk.

“Besides the four hundred ducats, Padre,” continued Gondoli, placing a full flask by his side instead of the empty one, on which the monk instantly seized and filled his goblet, “I have another hundred of gold ducats for yourself.”

“You shall be canonized, my son ; go on,” and down went the wine.

"The rascal will soon be drunk," thought his companion. But he was quite in error respecting the capabilities of the worthy monk's head.

"What can I do, most noble and most generous Captain, for these gracious gifts? Do not hesitate, for I have a wonderful pity for the failings of our fellow-creatures; and, provided Mother Church is duly considered, am always ready to help, to the best of my poor abilities. What, my son, am I to do for the two hundred ducats to my monastery, and the three hundred to my unworthy self?"

"You are doubling my offer, worthy Padre," cried the Captain, with a rather doubtful laugh, "I said four hundred to the monastery and another for yourself. However, provided you do what I require—and it is no great trouble—we will not quarrel about the mistake."

"There is scarcely anything but what I can do, my son, except fast; that I have never been able to accomplish, but I pay for the indulgence; my will is good, but my body weak. Now what am I to do?"

“Simply to perform a marriage ceremony.”

“Blessed Saints ! You pay well, my son, to get your neck into a noose I can fasten but not slacken,” said the Padre, rubbing his fat hands. “I’m ready, I like the business ; but where is the bride ? ”

“The lady is the Signora Justina Coralli, and she is now a resident in the castle. She is a ward of the Duke’s, and he has bestowed on me her hand ; but the lady is not willing—there is the difficulty.”

“Tut, my son ; a bold man like you talk of difficulties. Let me tie the knot ; the fair lady will be easy enough after a time. So it’s here the beautiful daughter of the Signora Coralli is ; and I suppose her pretty friend, Leta Cassalli, is with her ? ”

“Just so, Padre.”

“Now, I tell you what, Captain Gondoli,” and the Padre faced round, fixing his keen, grey eyes on the Venetian, and speaking in a calm, steady, business-like tone, “if you will treble your gift to the Church, and give me five hundred ducats, I will tell you a secret

that will make you as wealthy a man as there is to be found within fifty leagues of this castle, and give you rank and station besides."

Captain Gondoli stared at the speaker rather bewildered. Was the Padre drunk? A look at him convinced him he was as sober as himself.

"You astonish me, Padre," he at length observed, "but convince me that what you say is a likely thing to take place, and, depend on it, I am the man to pay for it."

"Well, then, here's my secret. Instead of marrying the Signora Justina, marry Leta Cassalli."

Captain Gondoli burst into a loud laugh, exclaiming—

"Upon my life, Padre, the wine is too strong for you after all. You are drunk."

"No, my son," the Padre replied, quietly filling a tall glass that stood upon the table to the very brim, and then raising it, held it several moments extended, "Does that hand, Captain, look like the hand of a drunken man? Your health. A hogshead of that wine would

not disturb my head. But, blessed St Nicholas ! it might my stomach."

"Then what can you mean by proposing to me to marry a poor country girl—a beauty, certainly—and I like her better than the other. But where is the wealth to come from ; where the rank and station ?"

"Listen to me attentively, worthy Captain, for what I have to say will make a nobleman of you. Leta Cassalli is not the daughter of a poor peasant ; her father is Bertran de Trevisano, Duke of Malamocco."

Captain Gondoli started, but immediately asked—

"Is it possible ? But what signifies that ; she must be illegitimate ?"

"No, my son ; she is his only and truly legitimate child."

"What !" interrupted the Venetian, "you bewilder me. He has two other children—and his Duchess."

"The present Duchess," answered the Padre, speaking slowly and distinctly, "cannot be his wife, seeing that his first wife, Louise Cassalli

that was, is still living ; consequently his other two children must be illegitimate. Spare yourself all kinds of remarks and expressions of wonder," said the Padre, "and listen to me for five minutes, and I will make everything clear to you."

Captain Gondoli sat perfectly incapable of uttering a word, so completely amazed was he by the extraordinary assertions of the strange looking being before him.

"About one or two-and-twenty years ago," began the Padre, "there dwelt at Lazise a widow with two remarkably beautiful daughters. The widow's name was Cassalli ; her husband was a highly respectable merchant at Brescia, but he became bankrupt and died, leaving very little for his widow and daughters. They came to reside at Lazise. One daughter shortly after married a small farmer, and went to reside near Peschiera. The other was—to make my story as short as possible—carried off by the Duke, then Count of Brescia, and brought to this castle. The Duke's great

confidant at that time was one Antonio Gataro—”

“What!” interrupted Captain Gondoli, “the same man who is leader of the outlaws in the mountains?”

“The same, my son. The Duke wanted a mock marriage to pacify the young girl, who, it seems, really liked the Count; but Antonio Gataro, for reasons of his own, determined to have a real marriage, and I, my son, was the very person who performed the ceremony, though the Count of Brescia thought I was a mock priest. After a time, the Duke got tired of his wife, for wife she was, and, leaving her in the castle, went to Venice. She escaped, and nobody thought anything more of the fugitive from that time to this. I gave Gataro a certificate, mentioning the time, place, &c., where the marriage took place, signed with my own name, and the name of my monastery. He paid me the sum agreed upon between us, and I rambled into other parts of the country.”

The Padre, during his narrative, did not forget the wine flasks, helping himself in such a

manner that Captain Gondoli became puzzled as to how his head bore the repeated draughts. However, the monk seemed to think little of it, continuing his story quite calmly—

“The Count de Brescia—I call him Count, for so he continued to be for many years after—the Count and his confidant Gataro went to Venice. I heard nothing more of them till the news came into this part of the country that the former had committed some desperate crime, and was condemned to ten years’ imprisonment. Time rolled on, my son, and I rolled on with it, getting, as you see, a little into flesh, but still pretty well otherwise, till by a chance circumstance in the way of my profession, and not necessary to mention, I discovered the residence of the Count de Brescia’s wife. She was then, and is now, a nun in the convent at Lazise. I then began, at first from curiosity, afterwards thinking it might serve me, to make inquiries about the child, and I easily found out that the pretty little child called Leta Cassalli, who frequented the convent, and was so much loved by all the nuns, was the Count’s

daughter. That was enough for me. From that time I kept my eye upon her. Dame Cassalli's other daughter, who married the small farmer, was dead ; and her husband, two or three years after, died of a fever, leaving his only child, a fine youth, with very little to keep him. Old dame Cassalli quitted Lazise, and took a cottage in the mountains, and there both Leta and the young Luigi grew up together as brother and sister. There ends my tale, and the wine, too, worthy Captain. It's dry work talking, but easy to listen. So, my son, excuse my taking more than my share."

"Have you any proof of all you assert?" asked Captain Gondoli, after several moments' silence. "To marry the Duke's only daughter would be a bold and magnificent step," and, in his mind's eye, visions of grandeur rose up before him, "but"—a sudden thought struck him, and turning to the Padre, he said, "if I marry Leta, and attempt to make my marriage public, the Duke's present wife and children would be utterly ruined, and their prospects destroyed, and the Duke himself furious."

“That you must not do, my son ; you must be content with the vast power you will hold over him to advance your fortunes. The secret you hold will enable you to demand any station and rank you wish for. Besides, he will purchase your secret with an enormous sum so as to secure the dukedom to his son, for without a son the whole of the great estates go to another family.”

“Yes, you are right, Padre,” exclaimed Captain Gondoli ; “his estates go to the Marchese d’Obizzi. What a dolt I was to stand irresolute, when I held his life in my hands.”

If Henrico Gondoli had glanced into the face of the Padre, he would have seen a strange expression in his twinkling grey eyes. After a moment’s pause, Gondoli observed to the monk—

“We were talking of proofs concerning what you have told me. What proof have I that Leta is the Duke’s daughter ?”

“Hear me, my son ; for we have a game before us that will make our fortunes. I told

you that one Antonio Gataro was the confidant of the Count, at the period of the marriage with Louise Cassalli; and he it was that made me counterfeit a mock priest; and since I gave him the certificate of that marriage, Gataro suffered many years imprisonment, and he now knows his master was the cause of his being outlawed. Since the Duke's return to the castle their quarrel has been made up; but the Duke, he tells me, has played him false, and he swears to be revenged. To tell you the truth, it was Antonio Gataro that sent me here; and it was to see you and not the Duke I came. Gataro holds all the proofs you want; and he will give them up to you, and aid and assist you in all things, provided you agree to give him ten thousand ducats the moment you get the Duke to consent to hand over to you the sum of one hundred thousand—the price of the secret. That sum he will eagerly give to secure the family estates to his son, and avoid the terrible exposure that would otherwise take place, if you claimed the rights of your wife; which

mind you, my son," continued the Padre, with emphasis and a marked and expressive glance, "are very great; for as an only daughter, her portion is this castle and the entire Brescian Estate, left by the great grandfather to be inherited by the female branch of the family in default of male heirs; for the property is a distinct one, and does not go to the Marchese d'Obizzi with the other estates."

Captain Gondoli was confounded by the greatness of the prospect held out to him by the monk; but after some further consultation, finally agreed to enter into the proposed plans, and Antonio Gataro was to be admitted secretly into the castle to a conference. In the meantime, Captain Gondoli was to exert his influence in persuading Leta to become his wife in order to save her friend Justina. The Padre insisted he should proceed calmly and quietly, and not attempt to intimidate the maiden. If he failed, then the Padre declared he would try, and he felt convinced he could, in a great measure, conquer the fair Leta's scruples to the union.

CHAPTER III.

TEN days have elapsed since the events recorded in the last chapter, and during that time Captain Gondoli had completely made up his mind to proceed in this bold scheme, without hesitation. Padre Benedette had been admitted several times to the fair captives; and a considerable alteration in Leta's manner to Captain Gondoli had ensued, which pleased the Venetian wonderfully.

Leta said she required a few days to make up her mind, though to relieve her beloved Justina and her mother from captivity, she was willing to make any sacrifice. The first step towards her favour, should be the restoration of the Signora Cassalli to her daughter.

Gondoli saw no objection to this: it was of no use separating mother and daughter, they had nothing to do with his projects; all he urged on the Padre was expedition, for fear

the Duke might get impatient and send a courier to him. Accordingly the Padre returned one day from an expedition to the mountains, and informed Henrico Gondoli that Antonio Gataro had collected all the proofs necessary ; had received the certificate which he had entrusted to the care of a staunch friend at San Giovanni ; that he was anxious to get away from the mountains, as the Government troops had invested all the passes, and had already taken several of the brigands ; that he would, an hour after nightfall, be at the castle gate, disguised in a capacious mantle and hood, and also that he expected the marriage would take place the night following.

“Very good,” exclaimed Captain Gondoli, “I am ready. I positively am in love with my intended bride. The only thing now is to prevail on her to let the ceremony take place so soon.”

“Leave that to me, my son, I will prove to her there is danger in further delay, as the Duke is daily expected.”

“Capital, Padre. If you can do that, you

are worth your weight in gold ; and that is no trifle, eh ? ”

“ No, by St. Nicholas ! I am in good plight,” observed the monk with a pleased smile ; “ but look you, my son, let us have supper—a good one, mind you, for Gataro is no chicken ; and let it be served in the wing of the castle where the captives are confined. It is remote from the garrison, and we must keep our plot to ourselves till all is settled, and not let any one see this Captain Gataro. To-morrow night you can select any two of your men you have confidence in, as witnesses to your marriage.”

“ All this shall be attended to, as I myself think it best to keep our proceedings from the knowledge of the Duke’s own retainers till it is over. There is a good room in the same tower, within the large folding doors. I will have a fire made there, and supper laid ready. Now, go and see your fair captives and try your eloquence with Leta. Upon my honour she is a lovely girl.”

“ Ah, Captain, you may thank this head of

mine for your good luck. You will be at the top of the tree yet. The Duke will get you created a Count at once; mark my words."

The day passed over quietly and satisfactorily to all parties in the Castle of Vigilio. A messenger had arrived from San Giovanni, with the intelligence that the Government troops had captured five-and-twenty of the brigands and shot eleven; and that the outlaws were endeavouring to escape across the mountains into Lombardy, but the snow had rendered that route scarcely passable, and it was generally believed they would perish in the attempt.

During the day there was a slight thaw, but towards night it froze again, and a bitter wind curled the water of the lake. The night also was intensely dark with every appearance of more snow.

At the hour appointed, Padre Benedette, with a confidential attendant of Captain Gondoli, proceeded to the castle gate. The warder was just about to raise the bridge for the night, when a Capuchin friar requested admittance, saying, he had a letter for Padre

Benedette. Before the warder could answer, the Padre came forward, exclaiming—

“My good father, is it you? You are come at a late hour, but better late than never. How fares the worthy Abbot? Enter the castle. I have worthy Captain Gondoli's permission for you to rest here to night.”

Accordingly the Capuchin was admitted, and conducted by Padre Benedette through the castle hall which was filled with armed men; some sitting round a huge log fire, amusing themselves in various ways, not the least diverting part of their occupation being eating and drinking. A ponderous oak table stood in the middle of this hall, on which was placed the substantial supper for the armed retainers of the Duke, flanked by huge stone jars of wine.

The Padre Benedette had contrived, during the few days he had passed in the castle, to make himself a great favourite with the men, by granting them indulgences and other little favours, so easy for a priest to bestow; but now he was in too great a hurry to pass

through the hall to listen to any of their entreaties to stop and partake of a goblet of wine, and bless their food. Something, however, he did say, with outspread hands, over an enormous pasty, but it was in Latin and best known to himself, for his grey eyes twinkled and a merry grin sat on his large lips.

“Won’t your tall friend take a glass?” enquired one of the arquebusiers, laying his hand on the Capuchin’s shoulder.

“Bless you my son,” said the Friar, “but nothing but cold water ever passes my lips,” and he went on.

“By Bacchus,” exclaimed the arquebusier, with a loud laugh, “you and your friend, Padre Benedette, do not swim in the same liquid.”

Without speaking, the Padre walked on, and passing through several galleries, came at length to the great folding doors that shut off the whole tower, where the captives were confined, from the rest of the castle. When they passed the door, the Capuchin said in a low voice—

“Bolt those doors on the inside, Benedette, and turn the key.”

This the Padre did ; a lamp stood upon a table, which the monk took up, and then his companion threw back the hood of his mantle, and disclosed the bold and masculine, though rather handsome, features of Antonio Gataro.

“Now, Padre, lead on, and no faltering.”

“No fear of that, my son,” returned the Friar, and on he walked till he came to a door, which he threw open, disclosing a large chamber, in the middle of which was a table covered with an excellent repast, and an abundance of wine. A log fire threw a brilliant light around the chamber ; a massive silver sconce held four lights, and stood in the middle of the table. By the fire sat Captain Gondoli, who, as soon as he saw the Padre enter, followed by Gataro, came forward, and held out his hand to the latter, saying—

“You are welcome, Captain ; we have not met before, but—”

That was the last word of welcome uttered by Gondoli, for instead of his hand being

grasped by the outlaw, he felt his powerful fingers upon his throat, with a grasp like a vice.

Henrico Gondoli was a strong man; he struggled fiercely, drew his dagger, and slightly wounded Gataro; but the next instant was dashed upon the floor with a violence that left him nearly senseless.

The Padre, at first, seemed rather startled, but seeing Gondoli on the floor, came to Gataro's assistance—who was very quietly taking a gag and some cords from beneath his habit—saying—

“I was not prepared for this. I thought you arranged for doing so after supper.”

“What,” said the outlaw, angrily, “eat a man's bread, drink his wine in fellowship, and then throttle him. No, no, that's not my way of doing business. There, don't tighten that end so much. Stop his tongue, but not his breath. Let the rascal live, if he likes.”

Gataro then proceeded to bind the legs and arms of his victim; and having done this to his satisfaction, he left the now perfectly sensible Gondoli to his bitter reflections.

“Now, Padre,” said the pretended Capuchin, throwing off his cloak, and placing a brace of pistols and a dagger on the table, “let us eat and drink ; we have an hour to spare, for it will not do to be too soon. There is no danger of our being disturbed.”

“None, Captain Gataro,” replied the monk, “for our worthy friend there left word with his lieutenant not to come near him on any pretence whatever.”

“This is a capital pasty,” said Gataro, cutting himself a fair slice, “but that rascal has hurt my left shoulder, I see,” looking at some blood that fell upon the board.

“Humph !” answered the Padre, with his mouth full ; “if he had disabled you, a pretty mess I should have been in.”

“It would have taken away some of your fat, Benedette, no doubt. Now, finish that flask, and then for our fair captives. The boat will be at the appointed spot by the time we reach it. Did you tell them to be prepared ?”

“They are all ready, my friend,” returned the monk, half choking in his hurry to finish

the contents of his platter ; then slyly putting a couple of flasks of wine into his capacious pockets, he got up, and re-lit the small lamp he had placed on a side table. Gataro threw on his Capuchin robe, and then stooped down to examine the fastenings of his miserable captive, saying, as he did so—

“Friend Gondoli, when next you attempt matrimony, avoid two evils. First, be not so changeable in your love, and when you call in the aid of the priest, be content with one, and never trust two ; and, furthermore, recommend me to your intended father-in-law, the Duke, and tell him I trust yet to get him within the range of my pistol.”

Thus speaking, he followed the Padre from the chamber, closing and locking the door.

“Thus far, my son,” said Padre Benedette, “this affair has turned out very well. If the door to the secret outlet has not been stopped up, we shall, thanks to St. Nicholas, be far enough away in an hour.”

“It’s not at all likely, my good friend,” replied the outlaw, “that this door should be

stopped up. Neither do I think it is known to any one now in the castle. Peretti disclosed it to me, and he said the Duke alone knew of the outlet. Ah! by Heavens, there are persons thumping, and hard, too, at the folding doors. Go back, Padre, and ask them what they want. Tell them Captain Gondoli will not be disturbed for an hour or two. Curse the villains, they knock hard."

Padre Benedette looked frightened, but pointing to a door, he said—

"That is the chamber; get the women out. I will be back in a minute."

He ran back to the door, and called out in a loud voice—

"What's the matter, ye varlets, that you thump against the door as if the castle was on fire?"

"A courier from Venice has arrived, and insists upon seeing the Captain this moment," cried one of the domestics on the other side.

"Very good, my son. The Captain is with the Signoras, but I will tell him. Go and keep the courier quiet till he comes."

The man retired grumbling, saying—

“There is something curious going on within, I swear, to keep the door locked against a man as if he was a thief.”

The Padre went back, and found the outlaw with the three females, well wrapped up in their mantles, ready to depart. The noise had been heard by the captives, who looked pale and anxious, though not alarmed.

“There is not a moment to lose. There’s a courier from Venice just arrived, who wants to see Captain Gondoli,” gasped the Padre, panting for breath.

“The deuce!” replied the outlaw. “He will find the worthy Captain quite ready to receive him. Follow me, Signoras, and do not be uneasy. Five minutes will place us beyond their search.”

Taking the lamp from the Padre, Antonio Gataro led the way along the gallery to a flight of steps leading to a lower floor. Down these they went, and when at the bottom, they perceived a low vaulted archway, cut out from the massive wall of the castle; and in this

archway, or rather niche, stood a rude stone effigy of some saint, with a huge cross at his side, upon which he appeared leaning. The statue was much mutilated and defaced. Putting his shoulder to the back of the image, Gataro pushed it forward with all his strength. To the surprise of all, after a moment or two, a cavity was disclosed, and a long flight of steep stone steps.

“Now, Padre, go forward with the light, and guide the ladies; but take heed you do not slip, for I see it is damp, and there are upwards of a hundred steps. Let me light my lamp to oil these grooves, or I shall never be able to push this worthy saint back into his place.”

“The Virgin guide us!” cried the Signora Coralli, taking her daughter’s arm; “what a dismal, narrow descent.”

“Dear mother,” whispered Justina, “thank God it offers us the means of escape. What matter the difficulty of the road? Liberty is at the end.”

“Courage,” rejoined Leta, “it is not so bad;

but it is almost too narrow for good Padre Benedette."

Antonio Gataro, after oiling the grooves, contrived to get the weighty statue back to its place, which, if kept in order, a child might move provided he was acquainted with the secret spring, which Gataro pushed back before putting his strength to the statue.

Cautiously the whole party descended the steps; at the bottom, a strong and massive door barred their progress. This door was fastened by immense bolts and two ponderous bars.

"You see," observed the outlaw, turning to the Padre, who put down his lamp to assist, "you see how impossible it would have been to force in this iron door from the other side."

"You are right, my son," answered the monk. "Your plan has proved the better one."

The bolts had been so long unused, that it required considerable strength to get them back. It was, however, accomplished, the bars taken down, and the door, after a struggle, opened outside.

A piercing cold blast rushed in that made the fugitives shudder ; but their joy and gratitude at their deliverance overpowered every other sensation, and each breathed a heart-felt prayer of thanks to Providence.

With a palpitating heart, Justina, with her arm supporting her mother, followed their conductors. The steps still continued, but only a few, and they then perceived that they were in a natural cavern, which, as they proceeded, became so low as to force them to stoop. At last their progress was impeded by large masses of rock.

“Now, Padre, you must exert your strength. We must move a few of these, and creep out. Do you not hear the fall of the wave against the rocks without ? The boat is not twenty yards off at this moment.”

After some considerable trouble and labour, two immense pieces of rock were moved, the toil of which occasioned the Padre to have recourse to a couple of draughts from the flask in his pocket.

“Now, ladies,” said the outlaw, turning to

the anxious fugitives, "I must extinguish the lights, and the Padre and I will creep out through this opening before you, and warn your friends that you are here."

So saying, Antonio Gataro extinguished the lamps. For an instant, they appeared in total darkness ; but the next, a faint light came from the apertures.

"Blessed St. Nicholas !" exclaimed Padre Benedette, in an audible voice. "I am undone. Look ye, Gataro, I can never squeeze out through this rat hole ; let us move another rock."

"Impossible," replied the outlaw, squeezing himself through. The females followed him with ease ; but it required many a mighty pull from the outlaw, and many a doleful groan from the Padre ere he extricated his unfortunate belly from the hole.

Justina could scarcely breathe, so complicated were her feelings. She was about to meet her lover, the being she loved in her heart of hearts. A few days back she thought

Providence had so willed that they should never meet again.

The whole party stood in a shallow cavern ; the lake before them, its waters rolling to their feet. The night was intensely dark ; and not till they were almost touched did they perceive two dark figures before them.

“Heaven be praised ! All is right, they are here,” cried the well known voice of Ferdinando d’Obizzi, as a faint exclamation from Justina showed the Marchese where his beloved stood. The next instant he was by her side and her hand clasped in his.

“Oh, Justina, this one moment of bliss repays me for all I have suffered—Pardon me, Signora,” he continued, turning to Justina’s mother, whom he could just distinguish by her daughter’s side. “I know you will excuse my unintentional neglect.”

The Signora Coralli could only press his hand, which he carried to his lips.

“The Count St. Felix had, while the Marchese addressed the Signora Coralli and her daughter, advanced to the side of Leta ; and

in words of great kindness, and even affection, greeted her, and congratulated her on her restoration to freedom.

"But for your spirit and forethought, fair Leta," said the Count, "we might have remained ignorant of the place of your captivity."

"I thank Heaven, Count," returned the maiden, in a low voice, "that the idea to write those words occurred to me."

"Now, Signore," called out the voice of the outlaw, "lose no more time, the boat is in a place where the ladies can get in easily."

Wrapping them well up in their mantles, for the night was piercingly cold, the Marchese and the Count assisted their fair partners over the slippery rocks, to where the boat lay. They could distinguish three men standing beside it. One of them stepped forward, and though the light was faint, he discovered the person and features of Signora Coralli."

"My honoured and beloved mistress!" he exclaimed in an agitated voice, "blessed is this hour of your freedom."

“Stefano!” eagerly, and with deep emotion, replied the Signora Coralli, seizing the man’s hand and pressing it; “my faithful and true-hearted friend, how happy I am to see you safe and well.”

The devoted follower of Balthazar Juven, could not utter another word; he raised the hand which held his with deep devotion to his lips, and then helped his mistress into the boat, wrapping her mantle closely round her.

“Ah, Lady,” at last broke from his lips, as he assisted Justina into the boat, “this moment of joy repays and scatters to the winds the sufferings of seventeen years of slavery and oppression.”

“Good God!” murmured Justina as she sunk down beside her mother. “My poor father and his devoted follower then endured seventeen years of slavery.”

“Alas! my child such is the fact,” replied the mother clasping her child’s hand in hers.

“Now shove off,” said the outlaw, to the only boatman amongst them, “and set your sail. Let us glide by the castle without a

word, or noise of any kind. The wind is fair for Desenzano."

The Marchese d'Obizzi seated himself at the helm, close to Justina and her mother, bidding them in a low voice not to be alarmed at the roughness of the lake. After they had passed the point, there was no danger.

The sail was set close reefed, for it blew very hard outside the point, but they were sheltered by the castle above, a vast dark pile, backed by the hills that arose behind it.

The boat glided on slowly, for the wind came in puffs, as it rushed over the walls and ramparts of the castle. They had nearly cleared the entire front, the night was so dark that the whole front of the building appeared one mass of rock.

"Keep a little further out," cried the voice of the boatman in the bows. "I can see the extreme end of the point."

As he spoke, suddenly a bright, even brilliant blue flame burst from the castle rampart, disclosing not only every part of the edifice itself but its rampart crowded with men, and the

whole surface of the lake to a considerable distance was as clearly to be seen as at noon-day.

“By all the Saints, we are seen,” exclaimed the outlaw, “make the ladies lie down.”

As he spoke a loud shout of triumph pealed over the waters, and as it did so, from some unforeseen cause to those in the boat, the flame on the rampart slackened and became extinct. The next instant, the loud peal of musketry rang through the air and a shower of balls tore up the water near them; some striking the boat and scattering fragments of its gunnel around them.

“Curse the cowards,” fiercely exclaimed the outlaw, standing up, and shaking his clenched hand at the castle. “I will repay you for this,” and turning round, he anxiously demanded—“Any one hurt?”

“No, thank God,” uttered those in the boat, whilst poor Padre Benedette muttered to himself—

“I have, blessed St. Nicholas, escaped

various disasters this night ; I should have been a dead man but for this flask," and he pulled the strong leather bottle out of his pocket. A ball had actually, after forcing itself through the upper plank of the boat, torn the Padre's gown and lodged in the flask, which was made of strong hide.

Before those on the rampart could renew the blaze or reload the guns, the boat was urged round the point by the Marchese shifting the sail. They passed so close to the rock, that the outlaw leaped ashore, to the surprise of all, saying as he did so—

"Farewell ; steer direct across the lake before the wind. You will hear of me," he shouted. "If we never meet again, God bless you all." The next moment he bounded from rock to rock, and disappeared in the gloom of the night.

"I guess that man's intention," said the Count St. Felix. "Dear Leta," he whispered, "thank God you are untouched," and he pressed the fair hand he had taken unhesitatingly in the moment of peril.

“Oh, Count, I have to thank you, for placing yourself between me and the fire ; but my God, I fear you are wounded, for I feel you shudder ; am I right ? ”

She spoke very low, and in a tremulous, agitated voice.

“Hush, dear girl, hush,” returned the Count. “No need to alarm our friends, it is only a trifle ; the delight of having shielded you is worth a dozen such scratches.”

“Good Heaven ! I knew it was so,” faltered the agitated girl, with tears in her eyes, and then, in her anxiety, speaking out, she said—“The Count St. Felix is wounded, for God’s sake let him be attended to.”

“Is that the case, Francis ? ” asked d’Obizzi, anxiously calling the boatman to take the helm.

All eagerly turned towards the Count, who, in a gay voice, replied—

“My fair friend here has startled you needlessly. They have certainly left me a token of remembrance, in the shape of an ounce of lead ; but it is in a very safe place, and I think

we had better not disturb it. It is in my left shoulder, and I do not feel much uneasiness. Any botch with a pair of pincers will get it out to-morrow."

The Marchese felt that the Count was right.

One thing, however, arose from the circumstance, and that was, that Leta discovered Francis St. Felix had made a deeper impression on her heart than she was aware of; and the Count himself felt that henceforth Bianca Grimani was no more to be remembered, and that Leta had gained a stronger hold in that somewhat feeble but generous and noble heart. The light boat flew swiftly over the curly waves of the lake, and before two hours had passed the dark shore of the opposite coast rose before them.

"They have not pursued us," said the Signora Coralli, "I feared they would."

"We took good care, dear Lady," said the Marchese, "that they should not, for we completely disabled the two boats, lying at the pier, belonging to the castle. Once landed at Desenzano there will be no further need of

flight or concealment. Once freed from the Duke's power you may openly defy him. For me," he added in a low voice, "his day of reckoning is to come."

"But, Marchese, I shall never feel happy till I am beyond the Venetian territory," rejoined the Signora, shuddering, for she heard the Marchese's words.

"In two days, Madam, you shall, please God, be in Milan, where you can be joined by your husband the Marquis. You see I know your story. Stefano has related to me the cruel narrative of your wrongs. Providence has aided our designs, and you and your beloved daughter will yet be clasped to the heart of a husband and a father."

"We are close to the shore," cried the boatman; "lower the sail."

This was done.

"How far from the town are we?" demanded the Marchese.

The man stood up and examined, as well as he could, the dark line and coast before them.

“We are about a mile below the town, Signore, I feel sure that is the wood straight before us. There is a good pier for boats a mile further on; so hoisting his sail again, in less than a quarter of an hour they made out the pier, and ran in behind it.

It wanted yet two hours to daybreak, and not a soul was to be seen. The town was only a few hundred yards from the little port which contained a number of boats of all kinds, lying at anchor within the shelter of the pier.

“There is a good hostelry,” observed the boatman, “facing the lake. Whilst you conduct the ladies up to the town, which is straight before you, I will run on before you and rouse the people of the house.”

Accordingly, after fastening his boat, he ran on, the rest slowly following, for the ladies suffered much from the cold, though they uttered no complaint.

“Do you suffer from your wound, Francis?” demanded the Marchese. “I fear we shall scarcely procure a leech at this village.”

“I shall go on to Brescia at once,” answered the Count; “that is as soon as I can get a horse, and have the ball extracted. It is lodged under my arm. It gives me but little pain.”

In a few minutes they reached the front of the hotel, which was all bustle, the people having been roused by the boatman. In a very short time the females of the party were tolerably located in a comfortable room; a good fire and beds were preparing for them.

In making enquiries, the Count St. Felix discovered that there was a skilful leech residing in the town, which was a place of much more consideration than he had supposed.

The surgeon was immediately sent for; in the meantime the worthy Padre Benedette was warming himself at a roaring fire of logs, and preparing, with his own hands, in a pan he took from the kitchen, a goodly posset of wine and spices to drive out the frost, which he solemnly declared had taken forcible possession of his stomach.

In half an hour the surgeon entered the

chamber, evincing considerable surprise at seeing the strange party assembled there. He looked to be a man capable of performing the operation required ; said he had resided many years in Brescia, and had acquired a tolerable independence. But Desenzano being his native place, he had purchased a small property and settled there, still continuing to practise when required.

He seemed astonished at having to extract a ball, but asked no questions ; and after about twenty minutes, he performed the required operation very skilfully, the Count bearing the pain with a stoical indifference that completely won the admiration of the surgeon, who strictly prohibited his patient from taking wine ; on hearing which Padre Benedette groaned audibly, internally blessing his patron Saint that the leather flask had saved him from such an awful infliction.

We must here leave our fugitives to their repose, and in our next chapter return for a short period to the castle, from which they had so fortunately escaped.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN HENRICO GONDOLI, after the departure of the Padre and Antonio Gataro, lay breathing heavily on the floor, totally incapable of extricating himself, either from the gag or the cords that bound his limbs. Bitterly he cursed his own infatuation, and fiercely swore in his own mind to be revenged.

Presently the knocking was resumed at the folding doors, and admittance, loudly demanded, echoed through the gallery. This continued for some minutes, and then there came a crash, and the doors gave way. Captain Gondoli eagerly listened, and heard the sound of feet. The door was opened, and his own Lieutenant, and several of the men, hastily entered the room, two of them holding up huge wax lights which enabled them, to their great astonishment, to behold

the Captain lying bound and gagged upon the floor.

"How is this?" exclaimed the Lieutenant, snatching up a knife from the table, and, stooping down, he freed the half-smothered Captain from the gag and cords that bound him, and then raised him on his legs.

The first thing Henrico Gondoli did, was to seize a goblet of wine and drain it to the bottom, and then to break out into a volley of imprecations. A little exhausted from the effects of the gag and his struggles to free himself, he could not immediately answer the eager interrogatories of his followers, but as soon as he recovered, he desired them to follow him, for that the accursed Padre and the false Capuchin, who was no other than the outlaw Gataro, had escaped with the captives.

Great astonishment was evinced by those present, all exclaiming there must be some secret outlet from the castle. They commenced a search, but all in vain. The captives were gone, and so was the Padre and false monk. Gondoli

was almost breathless from rage and vexation.

“Run,” he exclaimed to some of the men, for numbers had now assembled, “make all the haste you can; collect the materials we use for creating a strong light on the ramparts; perhaps we may detect them escaping by water, having got out through some secret outlet in the rocks beneath the castle.”

This, as already related, was done, but an accident upset the iron pan holding the blue flame, and when, in his fury, Gondoli ordered his men to fire upon the boat in which they had recognised the fugitives, their aim, which otherwise would have been fatal, proved, as related, nearly abortive, two balls only taking effect; one wounding the Count St. Felix, the other inflicting a slight flesh wound in the outlaw's neck, though he said nothing about it.

For some time Henrico Gondoli remained stupified with rage and despair. Not only had his high, ambitious projects of matrimonial alliance vanished, but his captives had escaped, and he left to sustain the full vengeance of the Duke. To pursue the fugitives, he well knew

would be utterly useless. They would cross the lake, and openly he dared not attempt to arrest them. He could see there were several in the boat, and he made no doubt the Marchese d'Obizzi was one of the number.

Suddenly a thought struck him, and the blood rushed to his cheek and temples with the quick revulsion of feeling he experienced from despair to joy.

"I am safe!" he exclaimed aloud, to the surprise of his men, but he heeded them not, desiring them to return to their posts, and keep a strict watch and guard. When daylight came he would search the shore beneath the castle, and endeavour to discover the way the fugitives had escaped.

"The courier is waiting with a letter," observed one of the men, "and is impatient."

"True," returned the Captain, "I had forgotten. I will see him now."

The man who entered, a regular Venetian courier, belonging to the Duke's establishment in Venice, observed—

"Here is a letter from my Lord Duke, and

his Excellency requires an immediate answer. I shall leave at daybreak."

"The answer shall be ready," replied Gondoli, taking the letter and retiring to his own private apartment to peruse it. The despatch ran as follows :—

"TO CAPTAIN HENRICO GONDOLI—

"I expect to hear on the return of my courier that the union I suggested has taken place. If so, you may restore the Signora Coralli to liberty, and supply her with sufficient funds to carry her beyond the Venetian territory, if so disposed. I shall expect you and your bride in Venice as soon as possible, as I shall not only fulfil my promise, but will procure you the important situation of Ire Porti.

"On receipt of this letter, send your Lieutenant with a dozen men to the cottage of Dame Cassalli, and let them secure the person of the old woman and her grandson, Luigi Cassalli, and convey them to the castle; and on no account let them see or communicate with any one. Treat them well, but look to

their security. Send, also, a messenger to the officer commanding the troops investing the mountain retreat of the outlaws, and desire him to secure the person of Antonio Gataro alive, and send him to Venice under a safe escort. You can then leave the castle under the charge of your Lieutenant, and come to Venice. Let me see you the moment you arrive. Attend to the contents of this letter, for they are most important.

“MALAMOCCO.”

A grim smile passed over the harsh features of Captain Gondoli, as he twice perused this letter.

“Curse on my folly and infatuation,” he muttered bitterly. “That vile Padre has ruined me. But I have a deep card yet to play ; and I think, my Lord Duke, you are more in my power than I am in yours.”

Taking a sheet of paper, Gondoli seized a pen, paused a few moments to collect his thoughts, and then wrote the following letter in reply :—

“MY LORD DUKE—

“It grieves me to have to state that your Grace's projects have failed, though not through any fault of mine. Some days after your Excellency's departure, a begging monk, known through the district by the name of Padre Benedette, requested to see your Grace. I had an interview with him, when, to my amazement, the monk, without any hesitation, said he had important communications to make which he would state to me, leaving it to me to communicate his disclosures to your Grace.

“The monk then told me that his conscience troubled him, and he wished to get rid of a secret that oppressed him. That he was the priest who married your Grace to Louise Cassalli, one of the daughters of old Dame Cassalli, of Lezise. Your Grace thought him a mock priest, and that Antonio Gataro had induced him for a sum of money to perform the marriage ceremony, and consequently that Louise Cassalli became in reality your Grace's lawful wife. When I heard this, my Lord, I

thought the Padre was mad, and treated his information as the ravings of a lunatic.

“The Padre insisted on his truth, and moreover averred your Grace’s Duchess still lived, and had given birth to a female child, which child was also still alive, with Dame Cassalli, her grandmother.

“I remained stupified at this most extraordinary and, if true, most unhappy intelligence for your Grace’s present wife and children. I demanded of the Padre some proof before I communicated such amazing tidings to your Excellency. ‘My son,’ he said, ‘I will bring you the marriage certificate I wrote out for Antonio Gataro. I know where to meet with him.’ ‘If you will lead me to him,’ I eagerly said. ‘No, no, my son,’ interrupted the Padre, ‘that I cannot do. To-morrow evening you shall see me again,’ and he departed.

“Now, my Lord Duke, the worst remains to be told. In the dead of the night the castle must have been entered through some secret entrance, for in the morning all three of the captives were gone. Nor have I been able

either to discover the secret outlet or to trace the fugitives.

“Your Grace’s orders in the letter I received shall be strictly attended to.

“Your Grace’s devoted Servant,

“HENRICO GONDOLI.”

“I think that will do,” muttered the Captain, as he read over his letter. I think, with this terrible secret in my possession, I need not fear the Duke’s rage. On the contrary, he will be glad to purchase my silence at any sacrifice; but,” he added, “this secret must out whether or no.”

Sealing his letter, he delivered it to the courier, who departed at day-break for Venice.

After taking two or three hours’ rest, Gondoli arose, and despatched his Lieutenant with half-a-dozen men to bring back Dame Cassalli and her son. In three hours they returned, with the intelligence that no trace of one or the other was to be discovered.

“The plot thickens,” thought the Captain of the arquebusiers; “I will now examine the

shore, and see if any trace of a secret entrance is there."

Again the worthy Captain was baffled ; there were two or three shallow caverns amid the rocks, but they were all blocked with masses of rock, and did not extend beyond a few yards. Extremely puzzled, he returned to the castle, and just as he was about to despatch a messenger to the Venetian Commander, an arquebusier rode up to the bridge and presented a letter for Captain Gondoli, from the officer in command of the troops in the mountains, saying to the warder—

"Deliver this instantly. I cannot dismount, as I must go to Peschiera for further aid."

He turned his horse's head and rode off at full speed. Captain Gondoli saw the man depart, and then opened the letter, reading with some degree of curiosity the following lines—

"To Captain H. Gondoli, from Commander Vanni Pontano.

"As soon as you get this, my good friend, mount as many of your arquebusiers as you can spare, and twenty of the Duke's re-

tainers, well armed on foot. Let them proceed as quickly as possible to the hamlet of San Pietro, in the mountains, where I have Antonio Gataro and thirty of his desperate followers hemmed in. My men are dispersed, and I cannot venture to seize him without a reinforcement. As I hold the command of this district, I request instant compliance with this order. Keep a strict guard and watch in the castle; my messenger goes on to Peschiera for further assistance. There are nearly one hundred and thirty brigands and outlaws in the mountains, whom I fully expect to capture before to-morrow night."

"This is very strange," muttered Gondoli. "Then he could not have been in the boat last night with the rest, but went again direct to the mountains. I would give five hundred ducats to capture him."

Calling his Lieutenant, he desired him to arm and mount twenty of his men, and with thirty of the Duke's retainers on foot, proceed with all expedition to join Commander Vanni Pontano, at the mountain hamlet of San Pietro.

“In less than an hour the arquebusiers and retainers left the castle, leaving ten of Captain Gondoli's troop and about thirty armed vassals to guard the castle. The bridge was raised at nightfall; sentinels placed on the ramparts; and, though Gondoli did not think it at all necessary, men were posted at different parts of the building to keep guard during the night.

It was a late hour when Henrico Gondoli retired to rest. How long he might have slept he knew not; but he was awakened by a sound, like the bursting open of some heavy door. There was a lamp in his chamber. In a moment he was on his feet, and, throwing on his clothes, listened. A loud shout and the report of an arquebuse rang clearly through the galleries of the castle. His door was burst open, and one of the sentinels placed in the gallery rushed in, exclaiming in a terrified voice—

“Up, Captain, and to the hall; the castle is full of armed men.”

The words were scarcely spoken when the

report of several shots were heard ; and wild shouts and outcries reached Gondoli's ears. Seizing his pistols and sword, followed by the man, he rushed down a flight of back stairs, and running along a passage entered the great hall. Several of his men bore torches, and the few arquebusiers had assembled together, and with the vassals of the Duke, were attempting to defend the entrance of the hall from a body of fierce outlaws, headed by Antonio Gataro, who, at the top of his voice, shouted to them to throw down their arms and their lives should be spared.

Frantic, and almost in a state of madness, Henrico Gondoli, pistol in hand, rushed into the midst of the strife, and levelled it at the head of Gataro, with a savage imprecation. The ball glanced from his steel head piece, and the outlaw, with a loud mocking laugh, shouted—

“ You are welcome, noble Captain, you will find this a truer weapon.”

He drove his heavy sword at the breast of the Venetian, running him through the body.

Gondoli fell dead on the pavement at the feet of the outlaw, one or two of whose men had fallen and three of the arquebusiers ; but the Duke's vassals, by no means devoted to their master, and caring little to defend his property, at once threw down their arms and craved quarter. The six remaining arquebusiers, seeing it quite useless to contend against nearly thirty well armed and determined outlaws, did the same.

“Now then, my men,” cried Gataro, “put these fellows into a room, and ten of you stand guard over them till we make an investigation of the castle and see what plunder falls to our lot. Mind ye, no lumber, you can't carry it across the mountains.”

Seizing a torch, and followed by four of his men, Antonio Gataro, who knew every inch of the castle, proceeded to the Duke's private apartments, broke open the doors, and bursting open the cabinets, plundered them of most valuable booty in plate and jewels, and various ornaments, when several of his men rushed into the chamber, exclaiming—

“Be quick, Captain ; the east wing of the castle is in flames.”

“The devil !” shouted the outlaw. “How is that, some of you have carelessly dropped a torch. However, there is no help for it ; we must make our exit by the bridge. Go, call the men together.”

Thrusting a large packet of deeds he had found in a cabinet in the Duke's study into his belt, and the men having helped themselves to every valuable they could lay hands on, the whole party re-entered the hall.

The flames were spreading rapidly along the gallery of the east wing, and as they caught the dry wood of the flooring and partitions, and rushed up its wooden pillars, could be plainly heard.

The Duke's retainers and the arquebusiers were appalled, as they beheld the first rush of the devouring element, as it made its appearance through the arches over the great hall.

Whispering his directions to his men, Gataro hastened to the gateway, and having opened the gates and lowered the bridge, they

all passed out, followed by the terrified retainers of the Duke. In a few minutes the outlaws had disappeared; and shortly after the flames burst through the windows of the castle. Assisted by the strong wind blowing, the whole vast pile of building became enveloped in a fiery mass of flame, sending its forked tongues high up in the air, throwing far over the lake a mighty blaze of crimson light.

The inhabitants of Lazise, roused from their slumbers by the arrival of the Duke's retainers, rose from their beds, startled and amazed by the fearful spectacle they beheld. During the long hours of the night the fierce fire lasted; seen even on the opposite shores of the lake, so vast and mighty was the conflagration; and not till several hours of the day had passed did it cease, and then, of that once noble pile the two towers and the front wall alone remained standing.

Thus perished the Castle del Vigilio.

CHAPTER V.

THE Palazzo Trevisano in Venice was built, it is supposed, by one of the Lombardi; a noble edifice richly ornamented in marble, partaking of the Gothic and Italian styles, strikingly marking the transition from the one into the other. The historical associations connected with it render it interesting. The Capello family once trod the noble halls, and from its walls the celebrated Bianca Capello eloped and commenced a short career of splendour to end in infamy and death.

At the period of our story the palace was inhabited by Bertran de Trevisano, Duke of Malamocco. What mighty engines are wealth and rank for good or for evil! What a power their possessor wields to cast a veil over the eyes of the world. What a mantle he possesses to wrap up and hide his vices from the knowledge of his fellow man. Even when those vices are publicly known, how

delicately they are spoken of, palliated, softened and glossed over by those panderers for wealth, rank and influence.

Thus was it with Bertran Duke of Malamocco. He arrived in Venice at a time of public mourning and calamity. Never avaricious for mere gold, he poured his ducats into the treasury of St. Mark. So exhausted, indeed, was the Treasury, as to force the once mighty Government to resort to the venal and beggarly meanness of selling nobility to the highest bidder; excluding only a Jew or a Turk. Even a foreigner might become a Venetian noble, provided he paid more for the doubtful honour. By this traffic the Treasury of St. Mark gained eight millions of ducats.

The Duke not only paid the contributions required, but, as we said, bestowed his ducats freely. To the poor he ordered large sums to be given; grants were made to the two churches of Sta. Maria Gloriosa de Frari and San Giovanni e Paolo. In the former church is the splendid monument of the ill-fated Doge Foscari, and there also a plain slab marks the

place where the great Titian was laid. In this church also was erected the monument to the late Duke of Malamocco; and there also Bertran de Trevisano expected posterity to behold his tomb.

The former life of Bertran de Trevisano was forgotten by some and purposely forgotten by others. He was received as a benefactor to the State, a friend to the poor and needy, and a pious son of Holy Mother Church; admitted a member of the Council of Forty, and another year would behold him one of the mighty Ten. He gave sumptuous entertainments; his Duchess loved splendour in her heart, her daughter was a countess by right, and her son was addressed as Count of Brescia. There were no more steps on the ladder to ambition and wealth to mount, and from the summit the family of Trevisano looked down with pride and glory in their hearts.

The trial deciding the cause of Contarini against Ferdinando d'Obizzi was over. The Lawyer, Grimani, in despair heard the decision of the judges, "that the Estates of the

d'Obizzi belonged to him no longer, and the Contarini claim against them was valid."

The Duke of Malamocco looked on and smiled. Ferdinando d'Obizzi, it was thought, was ruined. It was time enough to put forward his own claims, when he was surprised by hearing one morning that the Lawyer, Grimani, had obtained a power from the judges to prevent the claimant's taking possession of the estates for one month, swearing before the Court to produce the deeds, which he declared on oath had been stolen from his mansion.

The Doge Contarini, notwithstanding his son's opposition, was a just man, though in some respects a harsh one, agreed to give the Lawyer a month to produce the deeds, even after the decision of the judges.

Bianca Grimani, during this period, became changed, much of her depression and gloom had passed off; never very lasting in her attachments, she did not regret her firm refusal to renew her intercourse with the Count St. Felix; a sincere feeling of friendship succeeded her disappointed love for Ferdinando d'Obizzi, and

her ardent desire was to see her father retrieve his honour and regain his peace of mind. The loss of the deeds, which certainly was owing to his own crime in the beginning, tormented and tortured him daily. Everything that man could do to trace the robbers he did, anxious, at all events, in case of the worst, to save Ferdinando d'Obizzi from want ; secretly having the power to do so in his hands, he transferred the immense sums accumulated during the Marchese's minority into the coffers of the eminent bank of Venard and Co., in Genoa. This sum was quite sufficient for wealthy independence.

About ten days before the destruction of the Castle of Vigilio, the Signore Grimani received a letter from an unknown hand and unsigned. It merely said—

“Obtain one month's delay in your lawsuit with the Contarini ; before that month ends, I think I can promise you the Marchese d'Obizzi's lost deeds.

“A FRIEND.”

The Lawyer was amazed ; but hope revived, and he obtained the required time, though he

knew, even if the Contarini did get possession, the production of the deeds would restore the estates to the rightful owner. Nevertheless, he thought it prudent not to let them into possession.

The Signore Grimani was well up in the law—lawyers and victims generally are—one to their cost, the other in securing their costs.

The Duke was astonished when he heard that the Lawyer Grimani had declared he would produce the deeds.

“Impossible,” he muttered to himself. “I hold them under lock and key in my Castle Vigilio. This is a mere subterfuge. Still it is very strange. No one has heard more of this Ferdinando d’Obizzi.”

The Duke was going backwards and forwards in the magnificent saloon of the Palazzo Trevisano. He was expecting every moment the return of his courier from Del Vigilio. His dark, thoughtful features were an index wherein his heart’s secrets could easily be traced, when no observer was near ; sometimes he raised his eyes from the gorgeous carpet from the looms

of Persia that covered the floor, to the magnificent decorations of the saloon, to Titian's painting, "The Descent from the Cross."

With his heart full of vile passions, he dared to let his gaze rest upon the features of the Saviour of the world, so exquisitely portrayed by the unrivalled artist. Was he struck with remorse? for he quickly averted his eyes to another picture. It chanced to be "The Murder of Abel," by Tintorelli. He turned away with a foreboding¹ of evil, to him unaccountable. At that moment a domestic entered the saloon, informing him of his courier's return from the Castle of Vigilio, and presenting the Duke with a letter—on a massive gold salver—the courier brought.

The Duke took the letter, and as the man closed the door he gazed, as if his thoughts were far away, upon the document he held; suddenly he started, and with an impatient gesture, he uttered aloud—

"Am I dreaming, or turned idiot? It can never be," so saying he left the saloon, returned to his private study, locked the door, threw

himself into a chair, and broke the seal of the letter.

It was Henrico Gondoli's letter. As the Duke read he felt his cheek grow pale; his hands worked nervously, and his features became distorted with passion. Starting from his chair, he dashed the letter on the floor, stamped on it, and exclaimed furiously—

“Vile reptile—slave—you lie!” Then striking his hand against his burning temple, he stood the very personification of the picture of the first murderer, on whose features he had gazed a moment before with so unaccountable a feeling pervading his breast. Recovering himself a little, he raised the letter, and looking at the date, saw that the courier must have been delayed by some cause more than a day.

At this moment the noise of feet approached his study, and a hurried, agitated knock was heard.

“Who is there?” fiercely demanded the Duke. “I wish not to be disturbed.”

“Your Excellency,” said the voice of his

own personal attendant, "another courier has arrived with frightful intelligence."

The tortured Duke threw open the door, and gazed upon his valet, with features so terribly distorted by passion and agony that the man trembled in every limb, and stood gazing at his master, pale as death.

"Villain, speak," roared the Duke, grasping the man by the shoulder, "speak!"

"My Lord," uttered the appalled domestic, in a tremulous voice, "the Castle of Vigilio has been sacked, and burned to the ground, by the outlaw, Antonio Gataro."

"Villain!" shouted the Duke, losing all control over his passion, "this is a false and cursed lie," and with terrible force he hurled the man from him, stretching him senseless and bleeding on the floor.

The noise of the man's fall, and the loud tone of the Duke's voice, caused several of the domestics from the hall below to hurry up the stairs. Recalled to a feeling of shame by the looks of the bewildered servants who raised the

Duke's valet from the floor, Bertran de Trevisano, without a word, turned round and re-entered his study. Throwing himself into a chair, he remained gazing without consciousness of what his eyes beheld for nearly half-an-hour. Gradually, however, he recovered his composure; and though his cheek was pale and his lips bloodless, his nerves were firm. Again taking up Captain Gondoli's letter, he read it over slowly and deliberately.

"So then," he muttered to himself, "I have been made the tool of a designing reptile. That ruffian Gataro had some bold project in view, and the villain has sacked the castle. It is easy to see," he continued soliloquising, "that Gondoli thinks he has me in his power by being master of this ruinous secret. If such be the fact, that Louise Cassalli became my wife, and still lives, where is she? and is she aware herself of this strange and terrible deception? I have a skilful game to play, and must lose no time. I must hear from this last courier some account of this daring deed of Gataro."

Summoning a domestic, he desired the

courier to be sent to him. The man soon made his appearance, looking rather alarmed, having heard what a terrible passion the news had caused the Duke to give way to.

“Have you any idea,” demanded the Duke, “how many men were under the command of this outlaw robber, Gataro, in the attack on the castle?”

“Your Lieutenant, my Lord Duke, who returned to the castle after its destruction—”

“After its destruction?” repeated the Duke, looking surprised. “What do you mean? Was he not in the castle at the time of the attack?”

“No, your Excellency, he was not. He had been sent by Captain Gondoli with twenty arquebusiers and thirty of your Lordship’s vassals to San Pietro, to assist the commander of the troops hunting out the outlaws. It seems, however, the messenger was a false one, for there were no troops at all at San Pietro. So he set out on his return, and did not reach the castle till after its destruction, and then learnt the terrible death of Captain Gondoli.”

“What !” exclaimed the Duke, starting to his feet, his face flushed with excitement, “was Gondoli slain in the assault ? ”

“He was, my Lord.”

“By Heaven that was fortunate,” exclaimed the Duke, in a voice of exultation, “that villain’s tongue is silenced.”

Seeing the man, who was one of his own vassals, looking stupified at his words, he motioned with his hand for him to leave the room, saying—

“There has been some treachery in this business ; but it shall be sifted to the bottom. Remain in Venice till I have letters ready for you to take back.”

The man bowed and quitted the room.

“This is so far fortunate,” said the Duke, half aloud, “that one scheming villain is removed from my path. But this Padre Benedette must be got hold of. As to Antonio Gataro”—the Duke paused and looked troubled ; his thoughts were many and conflicting ; he felt tortured and almost distracted.

“If this terrible tale gets public, what a world

of ruin will it not bring down upon my head. My wife, no longer so, and my children illegitimate, and my name and race become extinct at my death ! ”

There was a load of bitter agony in these thoughts. If conscience had hitherto slumbered, the sleep was broken at last, and the future rose before the crime-stained Duke in hideous reality. He felt that the hour of retribution was at hand. “ What was wealth and rank to him if his first wife lived ? To whom would his wealth go ? To Ferdinando d’Obizzi.” The thought was maddening !

At length, after two or three hours of complicated thought, he roused himself into action. He resolved to proceed at once to the Castle of Vigilio and investigate every particular concerning its destruction. One thing he considered certain, which afforded some relief to his mind, and that was, that the deeds of the Obizzi property were burnt and lost for ever.

The intelligence of the burning of the Castle del Vigilio, by the outlaw Gataro, caused a singular sensation amongst all ranks of people

in Venice. The Government was greatly incensed at the audacity of such an outrage; and an officer was at once despatched to the Governor of Brescia with orders to send such troops as might be required to exterminate the outlaws, granting them no quarter whatever.

Strange rumours got abroad respecting the destruction of the castle; as usual a strong mixture of truth and falsehood. Several of the Duke's domestics arrived in Venice from the scene of the catastrophe. The Duke himself was not able to leave Venice for several days, being obliged, as a Member of the Council of Forty, to attend to most important matters connected with the State.

Eighty new patricians were admitted by purchase and enrolled. The State was making vigorous efforts to retain their possessions in the East.

The Signore Grimani listened to the various stories afloat through Venice, which stories were getting each day more complicated and mysterious. The Marchese d'Obizzi's name was mentioned; and it was even reported that

the Marchese was either concerned, or had instigated the outlaw Gataro to attack the castle, to free some lady that was said to be detained captive there against her will by the Duke's orders. Altogether the Lawyer was puzzled, for he fancied there was some foundation for those strange stories.

One morning, about a week after the burning of the castle, a large packet was brought to the mansion of the Signore Grimani, by a countryman, who left it without any observation or requiring any compensation.

The Signore Grimani, with a nervous trepidation, cut the cords that fastened the bulky packet, cast off the cloth that bound them, and then his gaze rested upon the lost deeds of the d'Obizzi family ; but not one word of explanation. Utterly bewildered and amazed, the Lawyer gazed upon the packet with an exceeding delight, for he would now be enabled to atone for the one bad act of his life ; a weight was lifted off his heart, and the old man actually shed tears of joy as he left the room to communicate the intelligence to his daughter Bianca.

Before four-and-twenty hours had passed, the Lawyer had placed the deeds before the judges, whose amazement equalled his own. The Doge Contarini at once resigned his pretensions; the question was set at rest for ever, for the worthy Lawyer took very good care that should such an event as the stealing of the deeds ever again take place, the occurrence should have no effect upon the fortunes of his client.

The very next day was the one the Duke of Malamocco intended to leave Venice. The news of the restoration of the deeds came upon him like a thunderbolt, and convinced him at once that there were enemies steadily at work to accomplish his downfall.

Leaving the Duke to work out his plans and projects to defeat those of his enemies, we must not only quit Venice, but even the fair land of Italy in our next chapter, and request our readers to accompany us into the territories of the French king, into that part of France called Provence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE traveller, even at the present day, who pursues his journey from Marseilles to Aix, in Provence, if he travels it in the month of March, will retain but very few pleasing reminiscences of the road. It was a day in March and the wind was blowing with all its accustomed violence and bitterness, clouds of white dust, peculiar to the road leading from Marseilles to Aix, were wheeling through the air in vast clouds, blinding and distracting the unfortunate traveller.

In the early morning the wind so dreaded in that part of the country had not commenced, and at that hour one of those great, lumbering, ponderous carriages peculiar to the period we are writing of, left Marseilles early in order to pass the mountain and reach Aix before night. Notwithstanding its unwieldy appearance, the carriage was as handsome as painting, gilding and decoration could make it. Great leathern

curtains protected those inside from wind and weather ; and it was drawn by four stout, handsome horses, covered with trappings, with the arms and crests of their owner very profusely decorating them on silver plates. There were four well armed outriders some distance ahead, and nearly a dozen followed ; for travelling in France at that period was by no means a perfectly safe affair ; and the journey over the bleak summit of the mountains could never till late years be accomplished without risks of two kinds of evils—that of being jolted to death in any kind of conveyance, or being plundered by robbers, with a not very remote prospect of being shot.

Inside the vehicle were three ladies and one gentleman ; two female attendants were perched on a very extraordinary looking coachbox in front. With the three ladies our readers are already well acquainted. The gentleman was the Marchese des Lesdiguieres, formerly Balthazar Juven.

We will in a brief manner account for their being at that period of the year, about two

months after their escape from the Castle of Vigilio, on the road from Marseilles to Aix. The Signora Coralli, or as we shall henceforth style her, Marchioness of Lesdiguieres, felt after her escape from the Castle of Vigilio, an extreme anxiety to get beyond the Venetian territories. Accordingly, the next morning, the Count St. Felix feeling very little inconvenience from his wound, the whole party set out for Milan, with the exception of Padre Benedette, who was resolved to return to his convent, and give up his wandering life, as thanks to the bounty of the Count St. Felix, and the Marchese d'Obizzi his donation to his monastery would enable him to enjoy many indulgences and privileges.

Leta was, at first, extremely uneasy with respect to her grandmother, Dame Cassalli; but Luigi and the Padre engaged to remove her into the village of Lazise and into a comfortable cottage, till arrangements could be made for her future comfort. As to Luigi himself, he was to follow the fortunes of the Count St. Felix, to whom he had become

greatly attached ; and the Count had serious intentions, if Leta was a consenting party, of entering into the holy bonds of matrimony. He resolved, though the mystery concerning Leta had been cleared up to him by Padre Benedette, that as Luigi was Leta's brother, to procure for him a commission in the French service, into which the young Cassalli was very willing to enter.

The short distance from Desenzano to Brescia was performed on the backs of mules ; but upon reaching Brescia a comfortable settee on wheels was procured, and the Marchese was enabled to obtain from the bankers there a sum of money sufficient for their purposes. The Count St. Felix had also exhausted his resources ; but in the bank in Venice he had a large sum, which he could get on arriving at Milan.

The disappearance of the outlaw Gataro astonished the Count ; for it was through his indefatigable exertions that Padre Benedette was found and induced to aid them. Stefano Paulo, the faithful follower of the Marquis des

Lesdiguieres, was encountered by them wandering on the hills, after the disappearance of the inhabitants of the cottage, and an explanation taking place, he joined their party. Well acquainted with every part of the Castle of Vigilio, the outlaw's object was to try and discover in what part the ladies were confined.

Disguised as fishermen, and bribing an old man, who had a large fishing boat near Lazise, the Marchese d'Obizzi and the Count, to excite the cupidity of Captain Gondoli, induced the Padre to state that Leta Cassalli was the daughter of the Duke of Malamocco; but such was not the fact.

We have stated that one of Dame Cassalli's daughters married a Signore of small property—residing in a farm near Peschiera—known by the name of Jacobo Molata; whose father had died shortly before, having lived in great retirement. The son employed himself tilling the ground of a small farm; he was handsome, and of gentlemanly appearance, and it was often said, in their vicinity, that the father

had seen better days, and looked more like a reduced nobleman than a petty land-owner.

After his father's death, the son saw and loved Dame Cassalli's daughter and married her. Luigi was her first born, and Leta cost her mother her life, which event plunged her father for the remainder of his life into a profound melancholy and neglect of all his duties. Before his death, he called Dame Cassalli to his bedside, and confided to her who his father was, but requested her, unless it might hereafter be of service to his children, to keep his name and rank secret. His father's name and title was Marchese Fremessi. This fact had come to the knowledge of Padre Benedette, in the way of confession from Dame Cassalli, whom he was in the habit of visiting for years. To suit his purpose, he stated that Leta was the Duke of Malamocco's daughter. With respect to his wife being still living, he was correct. After her escape from the Castle of Vigilio, she fled to her mother's house in an agony of mind indescribable, for the brutality of the Duke in declaring that her marriage was only a

mock one nearly unseated her reason. Her mother treated her with every attention and love the fondest parent could evince, and concealed her in her cottage till she gave birth to a male child, which did not, however, live ; and some months after, notwithstanding all her mother could do, she entered a convent, and after a year took the veil.

* * * * *

The journey from Brescia to Milan was easily performed in two days, and then the Marchioness des Lesdiguieres breathed with freedom. Stefano Paolo, furnished with funds, set off at once for his beloved master's chateau, in Provence, to convey the joyful intelligence to the Marquis, who would immediately return with Stefano to join his long lost wife and daughter. They were to proceed to Genoa to meet him in that city, from whence they could easily embark for Marseilles. Both the Marchese d'Obizzi and the Count St. Felix resolved to escort the ladies to Genoa.

We need say but little of their journey,

which occupied only eight days; they were eight very happy days for the two cavaliers and their fair friends. On arriving at Genoa, they easily procured accommodation in a mansion in the suburbs, preferring that to a residence in the city.

Having seen their fair charges safely and comfortably settled, the Marchese and the Count, after a long conference each with the lady of his choice, left Genoa to return to Venice, with the full intention of rejoining them at the Marquis des Lesdiguieres' chateau in Provence.

The parting of Justina and her lover was one of a most painful and distressing kind, for the Marchese felt himself bound to lay bare to her every secret of his heart. Justina wept bitterly, for she made no effort to disguise the deep love she felt for him; but she wept to think of the terrible vow he had made, which might, if it did not deprive him of life, yet separate them for ever.

Ferdinando was fearfully agitated. Before he betrayed his secret to Justina he had an inter-

view with her mother, who had for a considerable time imagined some terrible secret preyed upon his mind, from various slight observations she had made during their early intercourse at the Villa Bellevista. The Marchioness was shocked, grieved, and greatly distressed; but knowing how those rash vows of revenge were treasured and deeply planted in the Italian heart, and increased by the almost universal feeling of mankind at that period in favour of their being religiously adhered to, she knew not what to say or advise. The Marchese talked of openly calling the Duke to an account for his crime, and challenge him to meet him in mortal combat. It was a challenge he could scarcely refuse, for though the age of chivalry had passed away for ever, yet the open "duello" was at that period in its full baneful influence in every Court of Europe.

Still the Marchioness's gentle and loving nature recoiled from the idea of those too often bloody contests, and long and earnestly she used all her persuasive powers to induce her

young friend to leave vengeance to the Lord. Ferdinando d'Obizzi was no perfect character, neither was he without human weaknesses and pride. In his inmost soul he thirsted for vengeance; his mother's shade seemed at times to rise before his mind's eye, and reproach him for his too long delayed revenge.

Bitterly did he upbraid himself for winning the love of the fair and gentle being whose heart was all his own. What right had he—knowing that he was bound by a solemn and sacred oath—what right had he to give way to the dictates of his heart, to win the maiden's young love, to, perhaps, crush it in the bud? With these feelings tumultuously distracting his brain, did the youthful lovers part; and as Justina, in a passionate burst of tears, was pressed to his heart, she murmured in his ear, "I am thine, Ferdinando, in life or in death."

Different was the parting of the now again gay and light-hearted Francis St. Felix and the fair Leta.

"You will give me this fair hand," said the

Count, kissing the beautiful one he held almost unresistingly, "when I return?"

"Perhaps!" said Leta, laughing. "But you know, Count, we are both *rather* fickle minded. You may see the fair Bianca again; and I, in gay Provence, the very paradise of gay thoughts, may not be able to keep my heart from fluttering. Had we not better keep from rash promises?"

What the Count said in reply we do not know, but whatever it was it was sealed by a kiss, not on the taper fingers this time, but the rich pouting lips of the blushing but happy Leta.

After the departure of the two cavaliers, the Marchioness and her daughter remained in a state of intense anxiety, awaiting the arrival, the one of a husband adored in her youth, and never for an hour forgotten during the seventeen years of absence—the other of a father, whose name was ever on her mother's lips, but whom she had never seen. The mother's feelings it would be impossible to describe. Still,

in her prime of womanhood, beautiful, her heart beat with all the early feelings of her youth. Her love for Balthazar Juven was almost too great to be felt for a human being, it engrossed all her thoughts excepting the love she cherished for her child. Balthazar Juven, in his youth, was a remarkably handsome person, of a mild, gentle and loving disposition; to gain her love, he had brought on himself a fearful doom. But we must not anticipate; he must speak for himself.

At last husband and wife, child and father, met, and the Marchioness lay senseless upon the breast of her lord. What a moment was that for him, he that had gone through seventeen years of slavery; had wept in agony long, long nights; when, after those long years, freedom came he heard that his adored wife had married and died? What were the agonies of those seventeen years of slavery compared to the one agony of that moment? But now he held her to his heart, pure and unsullied, his own true, faithful and devoted wife—her arms round his neck, her sweet loving face gazing

into his. When recovered from her swoon of joy, was he not repaid for all his sufferings?

And what thought Justina, as she gazed upon the stately form of her father, his high forehead, his raven hair, slightly tinged with the marks of time, but caused more by sorrow than by that dread destroyer, for the Marquis des Lesdiguieres was then only in his forty-sixth year.

For the first few days the rapturous joy of their union occupied all their thoughts. There was no mention of the past ; all was forgotten. The Marquis beheld with delight and thankfulness his beautiful wife and daughter ; he was never weary of gazing from one to the other.

One evening the Marquis, with the hand of his faithful partner in his, and his daughter and Leta by his side, began the recital of his life. The early part of it was unknown, even to his wife.

“My father was a younger son of the younger branch of the noble family of Lesdiguieres, and possessed a moderate independence. My mother's name was Juven.

She also came of an old reduced family, and brought my father no other dowry save her beauty and amiable disposition. I was the second son. My brother, some five years older than myself, was a soldier by choice, and at the age of twenty-five distinguished himself and rose rapidly in rank. Before I reached the age of fifteen I lost my beloved mother, and shortly after commenced my career as a soldier ; but it was then a time of peace, and being literally a soldier of no pecuniary means, I resolved to try in other lands my fortune with the sword ; but my poor father's death delayed me for a time.

“Some time before that sad event, I had formed a strict friendship with a Cavalier Montcassin, also a soldier of fortune, and listening to his persuasions, I agreed to accompany him in the train of the French ambassador to Venice. I dropped my father's name and took that of my mother, and we reached Venice. We resolved when in Venice to look about us for a little while before accepting service under the banner of St. Mark. Venice was a gay,

dissipated city, and at that time full of foreigners from all parts of the world. I will pass over all the circumstances that led to my knowledge of that fatal and mysterious conspiracy that filled Venice with mourning and horror.

“It was Montcassin that first urged me to join him, for he assuredly entered into the conspiracy, whatever it was, for to this day I am profoundly ignorant of its intention. I was introduced to your father in his palace, where I met several of the conspirators; and as you know, my beloved, already, I consented, to gain this dear hand, to sign a paper of the contents of which I was actually ignorant. After our private marriage—which I induced you to accede to with the intention of withdrawing from the terrible plot and leave the country—I began to think I had a mortal enemy in Bertran de Trevisano, and he soon proved himself to be one. We quarrelled and fought, and, having disarmed him, I left him, devoured with rage and hatred.

“Stefano Paolo, as you are aware, is my

foster brother, and devotedly attached to me. His father was an Italian refugee, his mother one of my mother's attendants, and being unable herself to nurse me, I shared the same breast with Stefano, who, as he grew in years, attached himself to my service with a fidelity beyond price, and accompanied me to Venice. Stefano warned me that I stood on the brink of a precipice, and implored me to fly, and I resolved to do so, when the following night I was seized in my bed, gagged, bound, and thrown into one of the dungeons of St. Mark. Alas! when too late, I deeply deplored my infatuation in not immediately flying from Venice after our marriage.

“The agony of mind I endured for three days and nights I need not describe. In my narrative, my love, I will avoid, as much as possible, all events and circumstances too painful to relate, and merely mention them *en passant*. The fourth day I was brought up for private examination. What was my astonishment when I found that my judge considered me and Montcassin informers. I indignantly

denied having given any kind of information, and defied them to prove that I had.

“With a dark frown on his brow, and a most baleful glance in his keen dark eyes, the Inquisitor ordered me to advance to the table, and read a letter which was placed before me. Conceive my astonishment and dismay when I read a long list of conspirators denounced by me, at the bottom of which was my signature, so singularly exact that I was petrified with horror and amazement.

“‘I never wrote that letter,’ I exclaimed at last, ‘that signature is a close imitation of my hand, but it is not mine.’

“‘Do you wish,’ said another of the Inquisitors—this one was masked—‘Do you wish to sign your death warrant, that you deny the very document that saves your life.’

“‘Signore,’ I replied, ‘my life is in your hands. I do not dread death ; but my honour is dear to me. That letter I never wrote.’

“‘Take him away,’ exclaimed the first Inquisitor, ‘he lies.’

"I was hurried away before I could speak another word.*

"Two months passed in solitary confinement. I was wasting away under the torture of my mind ; you, my heart's treasure, occupying every hour of my thoughts.

"One morning four men entered my prison, bandaged my eyes and secured my hands, and then led me forth. I was conscious of being put into a boat, and after the lapse of an hour I was assisted up the side of a ship, and conducted down below. Then I was freed from my bandage and cords ; but, merciful Heaven ! a chain was placed upon my legs and thence to my waist. They shaved my head and put on me, in place of my own, the garments of a monk."

"What sufferings were yours, my dear husband," exclaimed the fond wife, as her arms encircled his neck.

A singular shade of some deep feeling for a

* Balthazar Juven here concealed from his wife the fearful fact that he was subjected to the question ordinary three several times ; at last so overcome was he by the agony, that nature conquered the mind, and he declared the letter to be his.

moment passed over the thoughtful features of the Marquis, but it passed away, and, stooping, he kissed the fair brow of his wife, and, pressing the hand of his deeply affected daughter, he continued—

“We were three weeks on the voyage. The vessel at length cast anchor in the port of Bouregas, one of the Venetian settlements. I was taken ashore, and the next day placed, with other convicts, to work in the docks. What was my astonishment, when amongst the other convicts I beheld Stefano Paolo, my faithful follower. His emotion was beyond control when he beheld me, for, breaking through his guards, he threw himself into my arms, sobbing with emotion and agony to behold me thus degraded. He was torn from me—oh! the heartless villain—and repeatedly struck by our brutal overseer.

“Not to dwell upon this painful subject, four months passed, and one morning two officers came up to the overseer, who was leading us to work, and ordered him to knock off my chains. My heart beat. I looked round to

see if my poor follower was there, but he was not. Freed from my chains, I was conducted before the Commandant of the fort. He looked at me a moment, and then said—

“ ‘ Balthazar Juven, you are no longer a convict. You have served the State, though guilty of conspiracy. You have been punished for denying your own act. Henceforth you may reside in the town, but the name of Balthazar Juven must be buried in oblivion. Take what name you please. A certain sum of money will be paid you quarterly, and you may select a convict to attend on you. But mark well what I say. Though not perceived by you, you will be under the constant watch of four persons belonging to the Government. Beware of attempting the slightest effort to escape ; you would be instantly detected, and your fate would be condemnation to work for the rest of your life in the Quarries of Khania. Whereas, if you conduct yourself with discretion, your complete restoration to liberty may be reckoned on.

“ I went and resided in the town, having

selected my poor Stefano to live with me. He was allowed to do so under the same restrictions. We were allowed a liberal income, and the people of that settlement, accustomed to political offenders living amongst them, treated us kindly.

“Stefano Paolo had been seized at the same time as myself, and condemned without any examination to the penal settlement where I found him. The life we now led was a blessed relief indeed from the one we before endured. We knew not who watched us, but spies there were every minute when we stirred abroad watching our movements. We, however, walked into the country, rambled on the sea shore, and strove to banish the bitter recollection of the past. That was impossible, your image was always before me ; sleeping or waking, at home or abroad, you were my sole thought.

“I endured this for four years ; but soul and body were wearied—I panted for liberty. The very air I breathed became hateful to me. Death appeared preferable ; a burning desire

to escape consumed me. Stefano and I planned a scheme in the open air, for we always feared to breathe a word when enclosed within four walls.

“It appeared quite possible to us to seize a fisherman's boat, and trust ourselves to the sea. The season of the year was not favourable for the attempt ; nevertheless we resolved to dare the perils of the stormy and, to us, unknown sea. We were well aware of the necessity for laying in a stock of water, and at least bread. About a mile from the citadel or fortress that commanded the town was a small cove, well protected from the sea by a long reef of rocks stretching across its mouth.

“In this cove we observed, in our walks, there were always a few light skiffs owned by pilots, who had a lofty tower on the rocks from whence they could see ships approaching the dangerous harbour of Bouregas, and thus board them before they encountered the dangers of the entrance, especially when particular winds prevailed.

“We never now noticed any one following

or looking after us, when we walked out into the country; we therefore resolved for a few days to carry out some bread and water in leathern flasks, and hide them in some hollows in the rock until we thought we had sufficient for our voyage. This we easily accomplished, and one very dark night, when the wind was favourable—for we waited for that—we stole out of the house in which we lodged by the back window, letting ourselves down by our bed-clothes. It was intensely dark, piercingly cold, and, what was worse, some slight flakes of snow were falling. Scaling the garden wall, we gained the country and made our way towards the cove, though not without some difficulty.

“When we reached the little mole, under whose shelter the skiffs lay, it was so dark and the snow so dense, we could not see a yard ahead. We had loaded ourselves with our provisions in coming to the cove, which was lucky, for had it commenced snowing so heavily as it did when we reached the boats we never could have found them. We tried all the four boats, and only in one could we find a mast

and sail, the other three were row boats. That with the mast and sail was both larger and stronger than the others. We cast off the ropes that held her to the mole ; we found to our consternation that a chain held her, padlocked to an immense ring in one of the beams of the pier, and it was also padlocked to the other boats.

“To find some instrument to force the padlock, I was groping about, when Stefano, busy looking for pins for the rowlocks, handed me a marlin spike he found in the bow of the boat. This was the best article we could possibly have had, and inserting it into the arch of the padlock, after a strong wrench I snapped the bolt. As I did so, a man’s voice hailed from the mole, shouting, ‘Any one in the boats below there?’ See him we could not, the snow fell so blinding and fast, driven by the wind which blew off shore into our faces. We scarcely stirred, but, taking out my knife, I cut the stern rope of the skiff that held her to her anchor.

“After hauling the boat clear of the mole,

as well as we could judge, the voice again hailed us, cursing somebody in no very measured terms; but our boat was gliding away from the land, impelled by the breeze; and thus amidst a thick snowstorm did we launch forth upon the perilous adventure of traversing the Black Sea in the depth of winter, in a light open skiff.

“But hope, blessed hope, though at times deceptive, drove all thoughts of peril from our minds—so ardent, so burning was our desire for freedom, that not one moment of hesitation did we feel in daring the perils of the voyage.

“The first thing we had to fear was the reef at the mouth of the cove, for see it we could not. We knew it lay right across the mouth, with a very narrow passage free on one side, while the other was scattered over with detached rocks. The wind blowing out of the bight left the sea perfectly smooth; so letting the boat glide out without sail, keeping as near the west side as we could without shifting, we managed with one oar on each side to

keep in the right course for an hour without touching anything or seeing anything, which convinced us we were clear of the reef and out of the bight altogether.

“Shaking the snow from our garments, and clearing as much as we could out of the boat, we set the latine sail with which the craft was provided. We were both tolerable seamen; reared in our youth upon the borders of three great salt lakes near which our family mansion was situated, we were easily initiated into managing boats with oars and sails. It was a favourite pastime, and now it turned to good account. We suffered a good deal from the cold and melted snow on our clothes, but the wine and brandy we had provided served us in good earnest.

“It was a fresh breeze and blew from the north: that much we knew before our departure; therefore by steering full before the wind, we should, if nothing happened to us, reach the coast of Roumelia in three days; but thinking, that when missed in the morning and the loss of the skiff betraying which way

we went, a fast galley would be sent in pursuit of us, and most likely follow dead before the wind, I thought it better, and the water would continue smoother, to haul our wind and endeavour to keep steering east for some thirty or more miles, and then cross the Black Sea. Having shipped our mast and hauled aft our sheet, the light boat flew along at a good pace. Stefano was in good spirits, and felt confident, poor fellow, that we should succeed in our daring attempt; and I also indulged in the same hope. All depended on the wind. In that most dangerous and treacherous sea I was well aware that if a real gale sprang up before we could cross, we should be swamped in an hour, so terrible was the short roll of the waves in that confined sea. But scarcely three hours after our departure, the wind, instead of increasing, began to lull, and the snow gradually to cease; and before another hour had elapsed the sky cleared overhead, showing the blue firmament and its myriad of intensely bright luminaries, and the wind fell altogether.

“‘I fear,’ said I to Stefano, ‘this bodes a

change of wind, the sky has not cleared for nothing. We shall no doubt have a westerly gale; if so, we must run our skiff ashore on the east coast, and try and avoid the towns where there are Venetian garrisons.'

" 'I imagine,' said Stefano, ' it's only a lull before a strong breeze from the same point. The cold is too great for a westerly wind. However, we had better have a pull of the oars, and get as far as we can from the island, the exercise will set our blood in circulation.'

" We pulled on till the grey dawn broke in the East. "

CHAPTER VII.

“WITH the daylight came a thick dense fog, moving from the westward as I feared, and very soon a change took place in the temperature.

“‘You were quite right,’ said Stefano, as he beheld the dangerous enemy, the fog, encircling us, ‘the changes in this climate are very rapid, the west wind will blow hard I fear.’

“‘Well, if it does, it will clear away this dense vapour, for I scarcely know which way to steer now. We have not wind enough to set our sail.’

“Feeling somewhat fatigued and drowsy, we both wrapped ourselves in our mantles, and lay down in the bottom of the boat to snatch an hour or two of rest; and singularly enough we both slept soundly, and evidently for three or four hours, for we were awoke by the motion of the boat, and on rising found it was

blowing rather fresh, and the fog lifting. Looking upwards where the sun shone clearer through the mist, I judged that the land lay nearly south and west.

We took to our mast again, set the sail, reefed and turned her head for where we supposed the land lay. The sea was already getting rough, but I saw, with much satisfaction, that our boat, from her breadth of beam, could stand up to her canvas in a very smart gale.

“Suddenly the fog began to rise and wheel upwards; a few minutes more, it cleared a space of many miles around us; but, as it did so, we were startled by the sight that was before us. At a short distance to leeward of us was a large, long galley under immensely lofty latine sails, working to windwards. We saw at once she was a Venetian galley; but coming down before the wind were two large zebecs, whose decks appeared crowded with men. A second look satisfied me that they were piratical rovers. The sea was known to be infested with several of them, under the command of a Turk, whose name for cruelty and hatred

to the Venetians was notorious in all their settlements in the East.

“The Turkish corsairs were seen at the same time as ourselves by the Venetian galley, and she instantly prepared for combat by brailing her mainsails and other preparations. The Turkish corsairs also prepared for action; and almost at the moment we perceived them, they brought their long gun amidship to bear upon the galley; and soon the thunder of its report pealed over the deep.

“In the meantime we immediately altered our course for, Venetians or Turks, they were all enemies of ours. But we were not destined to escape, for the Venetian galley went in stays and then stretched right across our stays; while the Turks luffed up into the wind and began to prepare for a deadly contest.

“To avoid the galley was out of the question, the sea was too rough, and the wind too strong. In a few moments she was alongside and hailing, and ordering us to lower our sail and catch the rope they prepared to throw us. To obey cheerfully was our only resource.

The sail was lowered, and the rope they threw us made fast, and we were ordered aboard, just as the guns of the two corsairs opened fire on the galley.

“The Venetians were too busy just at that moment to attend much to us; we were ordered forward, our boat made fast astern, and then the contest began in earnest. But the galley was too powerful an antagonist and her metal too heavy for the Turks, who after a few specimens of her guns, let fall their sails and bore away before the wind.

“The galley did not pursue, she was full of troops and was bound to Khandia. We heard this from some of the men, and shortly after we were ordered to go before the Commander of the galley, which had resumed its course. We were taken aft, and ascended to the high poop deck of the galley, where stood the Venetian captain; a stern, dark-looking man of some five or six and fifty years of age. He looked keenly at us for several minutes, and then said—

“‘Who are you, and what brought you in

such an extraordinary situation in an open boat in such a season? Neither of you are mariners, that's very clear.'

"To escape detection I knew was out of the question, and any story I might invent would only be derogatory to my honour, when discovered to be false. I therefore replied very quietly, though my heart was sore indeed, that we were Frenchmen. I declined saying anything further except that we were desirous to return to our own country.

"A grim smile passed over the features of the Venetian, as he said—

"‘I see very plainly how it is. You are two of those political offenders, banished to our settlements, and have attempted to escape, probably from Bouregas, and as I touch there, we shall see,’ and waving his hand, the guard took us away and confined us in separate quarters.

"Thus perished our hopes of escape. How I survived that hour and the following years, I know not. The mercy of God was great; it kept me from despair and self-destruction. I knelt and prayed, and I felt that in His own

time my troubles would end, and that I should be restored to you, my love, and our own dear child, and I bowed to destiny not without hope.

“We anchored at Bouregas, and enquiries were made, and our persons were at once recognised. We were condemned for life to work in the Quarries of Khania.”

The Marquis des Lesdiguieres paused for a minute, he felt the nervous pressure of his wife's hand, and saw the tears in her eyes.

“Beloved,” he continued, “I speak as briefly as I can, and avoid details of sufferings that must I know pain this gentle bosom I press to my heart with such a feeling of gratitude to the Divine Author of our existence as surpasses expression. My bliss appears incredible, but I will be briefer still, for the following eight years may be passed over in very few words, for the recital of one day's existence will answer for the whole eight years of terrible slavery.

“We were again clothed in the garments of convicts and carried to Khania, in the same galley that captured us. I doubt if it would not

have been more desirable to have fallen into the hands of the Turks. Arrived at Khania we were set to work in the quarries with two hundred other convicts. At night we were chained and lodged in sheds; in the morning the chains were knocked off, and we worked in gangs under task masters, and thus passed eight years. Yet through those eight years, the mercy of God was great towards Stefano and myself; though more than half our numbers perished by sickness and want of strength, we continued well and strong. Blessed with good constitutions, we weathered the terrible ordeal; but the moment of our deliverance, when least expected, was at hand.

“Candia had fallen into the power of Mohammed, the enterprising Vizier of Ibrahim the Sultan, and now Khania was invested by the Turks in vast numbers. We were divested of our chains and our convict garments, and placed in the ranks to fight against the Turks. This was a blessed relief.

“For fifty-seven days this terrible siege continued, during which the Turks were said to

have lost twenty thousand men. Here again we escaped death, and when the place surrendered we contrived with many others to embark in a carac and launched out into the wide sea, and after a favourable voyage we reached Byzantium. Every one now shifted for himself, and finding an Italian vessel bound for Palermo, we agreed to work our passage, for not a piece of money of any kind did we possess. We reached Palermo in safety, and then indeed did we, in the church of Annunziata, return to the Almighty our fervent thanks for our deliverance from degradation and slavery of seventeen years continuance.

“My first enquiry was whether there was any Consul or Minister from the French Court at Palermo, and to my great joy I heard that a Monsieur de Merionet, a gentleman from Marseilles, was the French Consul there. I immediately waited on him, and stated who I was. He was not personally acquainted with me, but the name of Lesdiguières was too well known in France not to be known to him. He was greatly astonished at my declaring I

was a member of a younger branch of that noble house. My mother's family he knew well. I told him my story. He was a simple but kind-hearted man, had been many years from his native land, and married to an Italian lady. He at once supplied me with sufficient funds to proceed on my voyage home and to procure other clothes.

“It was not my intention, however, to return at once to France. My whole heart and soul was bent upon getting to the nearest town to the Venetian territories, that I might make enquiries after you, my never for one moment forgotten wife. With the amiable family of Monsieur de Merionet I remained nearly a month before I had an opportunity of embarking for Leghorn. His amiable wife insisted on hearing my story in full, and to her and her charming daughters, whose hearts were full of the kindest feelings, I told my tale of sufferings, and won all their sympathy and aid.

“At last a vessel sailed for Leghorn, and supplied with every necessary and ample funds, I sailed with the wishes and prayers of that kind

family, and reached Leghorn the fifth day. From thence we proceeded to Rovigo, and here I resolved to remain, Stefano having determined to proceed alone, disguised, to Venice. I would have gone too, but listened to his ardent remonstrances not to incur so terrible a risk. After seventeen years it was not likely so humble an individual as himself would be remembered by any one; besides he had a facility of disguising himself so as to defy detection.

“I remained in Rovigo in a state of great mental anxiety. What did I not dread to hear after the lapse of seventeen long years? I was fearful to dwell upon my thoughts; and so terribly excited did I become, that had not Stefano suddenly returned, after an absence of three weeks, I should most certainly have proceeded to Venice. Need I, my beloved wife, describe to you the fearful shock I experienced when Stefano, who looked haggard and worn, so deeply affected was his mind, related to me the horrible tidings of your having married the Duke of Malamocco, and your death.

“For the first time in those long years mind and body gave way, and for three months I lay on my couch, struggling between life and death. The world was henceforth to me a blank. I rose from my bed the shadow of my former self, and listlessly and like a child gave up myself to the guidance of my faithful follower. We returned to Leghorn, and there I slowly regained my health, and then embarked for France, with a kind of gnawing at my heart to hear something of my kindred.

“We reached Marseilles, and then proceeded to my paternal home. Alas! all was desolate there. I was received like one risen from the dead. Strange tidings awaited me. My only brother was dead, fell in battle in the moment of victory; my two uncles and the heir to the Marquisate of Lesdiguieres were all dead; the young heir perished in a duel in Paris. Thus, when I returned, broken-hearted, and utterly careless of either rank or riches, I found myself Marquis des Lesdiguieres, and owner of the three richest estates in the South of France.

“One morning, on rising, I found a letter on my dressing table; on opening it I discovered that it was written by Stefano. It ran as follows—

“‘I leave you, my Lord, without letting you know or giving you a hint of my intention. Intreating you to pardon this desertion; but believe me, my motive is a good one. Have a little patience, and you may yet have good tidings from your faithful and devoted,

“‘ STEFANO.’

“I felt myself tremble all over. Could it be possible that he had received any tidings contradicting the reports which he had heard in Venice, with respect to your marriage and death? I was bewildered. A strange hope sprung up in my breast, for I knew Stefano would not easily be led into so strange a proceeding as to returning into Italy without having received some intelligence beyond mere rumour.

“I was, however, roused from my apathy and listless life, by a summons from my

nearest relation, the great Marechal de Lesdiguières, to appear at the Court of the French King to do homage, &c., &c., for my title and estates. Accordingly I proceeded to Paris, was presented by the Marechal to his Majesty, and was graciously received. Having spent nearly a month partaking, much against my will, of the formal festivities of that gorgeous Court, I set out for Provence, to visit the principal estate of the Marquisate, the noble and truly magnificent Chateau Lesdiguières. I was received with every demonstration of joy by my numerous vassals, and still my heart ached at the desolation and loneliness I felt. At the expiration of four months, a courier reached me from Cette, bringing a letter forwarded there by Stefano Paolo.

“Heavens! how my heart beat, how my hand shook. The blood ran wildly through my veins. I tore it open at last. It contained but three lines. Words never to be forgotten, they were—

“‘Patience, my beloved Lord. The Al-

mighty has crowned my efforts with success. I have discovered your wife and daughter, pure and unspotted in fame and honour. Patience till my next.'

"There was neither date nor residence. What a revulsion of feeling! I fell on my knees, my gratitude to Heaven was boundless. I was for a time bereft of all my faculty of thought. I know not even now how I acted. After a time, I became calm; but the hours and days were counted. Weeks passed over, and I began to get full of care, when one evening the door of my chamber was opened, and Stefano entered, his face flushed with joy and rapture. I knew all was right. I caught him in my arms, pressed this devoted follower to my heart, as I would the dearest of brothers. That night I was the happiest of human beings, raised from the lowest despondency to the height of bliss. I was a husband and a father.

"How eagerly I questioned Stefano, as to how you looked after seventeen years of separation, and how my child looked; was she like her mother? and a thousand other questions.

Then I made Stefano sit down, and relate to me the whole of his adventures.

“It seems that when he first went to Venice, by cautious enquiries in various quarters, he learnt the fate of many connected with that fearful period. He heard of Bertran de Trevisano's dreadful deed and his imprisonment for ten years ; and then of his brother's marriage with you, my beloved, and of your death in childbirth. Shocked, distressed and totally dispirited, he dreaded returning to me with the fearful intelligence he had gained.

“It struck Stefano that there was something mysterious in the whole story ; and he resolved at another time to investigate the matter more closely, without saying anything to me of his intention.

“After our return to France, and established in my paternal home, he determined to return to Venice. He was urged to this by a letter he received from an old and attached friend there, whom he had requested to make all kinds of enquiries. This friend wrote him word, that he felt convinced the Duchess of

Malamocco was still alive. Astonished at this intelligence, he resolved secretly to depart, without awakening too much hope in my mind.

“He took from my drawer a ring, which in all my vicissitudes and slavery I never lost—a ring, your first gift to me; and to Italy he went. After months of indefatigable search and enquiry, in various disguises, he at last discovered you in the cottage near the Lake of Garda. He was aware you were in the power of Bertran de Trevisano, then Duke of Malamocco. He knew nothing of your story; he had found you, and that contented him. He contrived to give you the ring and my letter which he had carried with him from the first, and afterwards aided by the gallant Marchese d’Obizzi and his friend the Count St. Felix—who, by the by, is a distant relation of mine, on the mother’s side—effected your liberation. Stefano’s amazement was great indeed, when he learned the full particulars of your strange and numerous vicissitudes. The next day I proceeded to Marseilles and sailed for Genoa, and now,

light of my life, I long to return with you to the castle of my ancestors, trusting in the Almighty God, that after seventeen years of trials and adversities, we may pass the rest of our lives in peace and happiness."

A few days after the Marquis des Lesdiguières had thus given a brief outline of his life for the seventeen years passed in slavery, the whole family set sail for Marseilles. The voyage, a short and pleasant one along the diversified shores of the Mediterranean, afforded a great treat to Leta, who for the first time tested the perils of the deep. Arriving at Marseilles, where his carriage and servants were awaiting his arrival as directed, a few days were devoted to rest and visiting the few objects, beside the city itself, worthy of observation, and then the party again set forth, and late in the following evening reached the splendid chateau of the Lesdiguières family. There we must leave them, enjoying after so many years of trials and privations, rest, peace and happiness; the only alloy being anxiety to hear from those friends they left in Italy.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON reaching Milan, after their separation from the Marchioness des Lesdiguieres and their fair mistresses, the Marchese d'Obizzi and the Count St. Felix resolved to stay a day or two, wishing to make some enquiries concerning the family of Leta's grandfather, for it struck the Count, in his conversations with Antonio Gataro and Padre Benedette, it was very possible that Milan, having fallen under another rule, the attainder against the family of Fremessi had been reversed.

Now, from all the Count could learn, he felt satisfied that the exiled Marchese Georgio Fremessi was perfectly ignorant of conspiring against the Duke of Milan.

On making enquiries of an eminent lawyer as to who possessed the estates of the Fremessi family, they were astonished to hear that the estates had some fifteen years back been restored to a distant branch of the Fremessi

family, and, most unfortunately, that the only male branch of that family, a youth of some three or four and twenty years of age, had died, and, that no heir or claimant appearing for the title and estates, they would fall to the Duke of Milan. The Count St. Felix was astonished, and at once put the lawyer into possession of the facts he knew relating to the late Marchese de Fremessi, and stated that a son and daughter of that exiled nobleman actually existed.

The lawyer listened with considerable surprise and no little satisfaction, for visions of considerable emolument floated before his eyes. Taking notes of all the Count knew of the family, the name the Marchese took when residing near Peschiera, dates and other details, he undertook to make the necessary enquiries and researches, and to go himself to Peschiera, and investigate the registers with respect to the birth, &c., &c., of Luigi and Leta Fremessi, and to place the whole case before the Duke.

"This is very satisfactory," said the Count St. Felix to Ferdinando d'Obizzi as they left

the lawyer's mansion and proceeded towards their hotel. "If I can make our young friend Luigi Marchese de Fremessi, and little Leta a Countess, it will be doing something. Two or three years' service in the army will polish up Luigi, who is a remarkably handsome young fellow."

They were just then passing the Piazza Borromeo, when a tall Signore, well dressed and wrapped in a large mantle, came directly in front of them. On looking up, his slouched beaver and single plume shading his features, the three at the same moment mutually recognised each other. The stranger was the outlaw, Antonio Gataro.

"You are the very persons I most wished to see," said the outlaw, speaking first

"By Jupiter," ejaculated the Count, "are you dropped from the clouds? This meeting is fortunate, we also wished to see you; follow us to our hotel. We have much to say."

"What I have to say will rather astonish you Signores," returned the outlaw, with a

strange smile; and all three were soon seated in a saloon of the *Croce di Malta*.

“What induced you, Captain Gataro,” demanded the Count St. Felix, “to quit us that night in the manner you did, leaving us so much in your debt?”

“In truth, Count,” returned the outlaw with a smile, “I felt a strong desire to repay that traitor Gondoli a debt I owed him, as well as for the cowardly shot he fired at us when passing the Castle of Vigilio, for he was perfectly aware the boat contained ladies. These determined me to follow up a plan I had long before conceived.”

The Marchese d’Obizzi looked at the outlaw, partly surmising what was to follow, and Captain Gataro went on—

“You may remember, Count, we were getting to close quarters on the mountains, and the troops sent against us were daily hemming us in. So when I returned that night to my comrades, I made the proposal to storm the Duke’s castle by the secret outlet, divide the

plunder, and each man to trust to his own resources after. This was agreed to. But, as we were only twenty-seven men, and the castle contained, besides fifty armed retainers, over twenty arquebusiers, there was a slight hesitation amongst my followers, till I hit upon a plan. In a skirmish a few days before, we captured one of the arquebusiers under the command of the Venetian captain sent against us.

“One of my men, attired in the arquebusier's uniform, mounted your black horse, my Lord, with a letter I forged, purporting to come from the troops above San Pietro, rode up to the castle gates, delivered the letter, and then rode on as if to Peschiera.

“The ruse succeeded ; Captain Gondoli sent off some of his arquebusiers, and also a party of armed retainers, to San Pietro. The night fixed upon for the attack was extremely dark. We entered through the secret entrance. I forgot to mention that the night I left you all in the boat, I returned to the cave, and, after a most laborious piece of work, rolled back the huge

rock and filled up the gap, fearing Captain Gondoli might take it into his head to search for the outlet.

“We completely succeeded in our attack, and with the loss of only two men. Captain Gondoli himself did his best to shoot me through the head; but failing, I ran him through the body, which ended his career; unfortunately, some of my men, I suppose, must have dropped a torch, for the castle took fire, and as nothing could be done to arrest the progress of the flames, it was burnt to the ground; only the eastern tower and front walls remaining of the whole edifice.”

The Marchese looked very thoughtful, while the Count said—

“That will be a *bonne bouche* for my Lord the Duke, when he gets the news. I hope there were no lives lost in the fire.”

“Not one,” returned Gataro; “but you will be rather surprised, my Lord Marchese,” he continued, fixing his dark eyes upon Ferdinando d’Obizzi, “when I tell you that part of my plunder taken from the Duke’s cabinet con-

sisted of your identical deeds, taken from that unfortunate rascal, Jaques Maletot, who was killed in cold blood by that ruffian Beppo, who, by the way, died of the pistol shot he received from you, my Lord."

"I would rather you had recovered the deeds any other way, Captain Gataro," said the Marchese, thoughtfully; "my name may be coupled with yours in the burning of the castle; and it may not be so easy to clear myself of the deed. Still, you have served me generously and courageously, and incurred great risk yourself; what is more, you saved a lady who is more dear to me than life, and I hold myself your debtor for the sum agreed upon, ten thousand ducats. But what have you done with the deeds? I had my suspicions that they were in the Duke's possession, after that affair at Peschiera."

"As I did not know when or where I should meet your Lordship," said the outlaw, "and knowing the necessity of their being restored before the finish of the lawsuit the Count St. Felix mentioned to me was pending in the law

courts in Venice, I forwarded them by a safe messenger to the Signore Grimani, giving him warning beforehand, so by this time the case is decided in your favour.

“But that is not all I discovered in the Duke’s cabinet! Seeing a bundle of papers carefully sealed up, close to the deeds, I took them also, and have them now in my possession. I find they were documents belonging to the Marchese Fremessi, the same whose son married the daughter of old Dame Cassalli. He married her under his real name; and the marriage was registered in the chapel of San Geronimo, near Peschiera. So the Duke must have discovered that the poor girl he supposed he had married was the grand-daughter of a Milanese nobleman, whose title and estates were confiscated and himself exiled by the late Duke of Milan. He must have got possession of those papers years after. The cottage and land on which the exiled Milanese lived belonged to the Duke. But how he got them, except through the agency of that villain,

Peretti, who knew everything, I cannot imagine."

"This is most singular and fortunate," exclaimed the Count. "You are, Captain Gataro, destined to be of infinite use to us all. Those papers will be of vast service, for you must know that from enquiries we made not two hours since, we find the attainder was reversed in favour of the Fremessi family by the present Duke ; and the last holder of the title and estates dying the other day, Luigi Fremessi becomes the undisputed heir. You must let us have these papers, or else take them to a lawyer called the Signore Pianea, who lives in the corner house of the Piazza Amorosa."

"You have not told us how you escaped out of the Venetian territory after your exploit," said Ferdinando d'Obizzi.

"Why, we regained our mountain retreat, Marchese, divided our spoils, and separated after a terrible struggle with the snow on the heights of the mountains. I made my way with one comrade only across the mountain ridge to Caprino ; then crossed the Lake of Garda at night in a

fisherman's boat, and giving him a couple of ducats, he procured me a muleteer's dress. My comrade and I parted here. He said he should make his way into the Tyrol, while I contrived, by making a circuit, to get to this city.

"I forgot to say, I had a short interview with Luigi Cassalli, or rather Fremessi; he placed his grandmother in a comfortable house in Lazise, and by this time you will find him with both your horses at Brescia, at the Duc Torre. I heard of your passage through that city, and was daily in expectation of seeing you on your return, and every day made a call at the different hostelries, and so I should, even if I had not met you, have found you this evening."

"You have served us faithfully and generously, Captain Gataro," said Ferdinando d'Obizzi; "and though I sincerely regret the sacking and burning of the Castle of Vigilio, not from any feeling whatever for the detestable owner, only that such means of redress for your wrongs or mine are contrary to the laws, and will, no doubt, be investigated. But I sincerely rejoice that you have escaped out of the Venetian terri-

tories. I should, however, recommend you not to trust yourself too openly here, for it would not be the first time the rulers of Milan betrayed refugees into the vindictive power of the Venetian Government."

"I am fully aware of that danger, my Lord," returned Gataro, "and only waited your arrival to do something with the papers I possess. I intend proceeding to France and endeavour to get a commission in the French King's musketeers, and trust to lead a better life for the future. I was most unjustly outlawed; the deceit and treachery of the Duke of Malamocco drove me to commit one or two acts I would rather forget; and yet, had it not been for those very acts, a most unhappy fate might have awaited those Signoras we most fortunately rescued."

"I will tell you what I will do for you, Captain Gataro," said the Count St. Felix. "I will give you a letter to the Marechal des Lesdiguières. I will state, without entering into any particulars, that you have been of infinite service to me, and saved me from considerable

difficulties ; and request him to second your wishes. If any man can procure your admission into the musketeers, he can and will."

Captain Gataro, who was a remarkably fine soldierly-looking man, and still in the prime of life as to vigour and strength, was delighted, and expressed his gratitude warmly.

"I will," remarked the Marchese d'Obizzi in the course of conversation, "I will remit the ten thousand ducats I mentioned to you into the Bank of France to your credit, the moment I get to Venice ; so that you may enter on your future career with a feeling of independence. But I would strongly recommend you in associating with your comrades to avoid every mention of your past career."

"My Lord, your generosity and kindness overpower me. You may depend I will follow your advice to the letter. I am quite alone in the world, fond to excess of military life, and if I am successful in entering the French King's service, it will be the height of my ambition."

Captain Gataro then took his leave, promising to go at once and lodge the documents he had with the Lawyer Signore Pianea.

The following day the Marchese and the Count proceeded to Brescia, and at the Duc Torre were received by Luigi with every demonstration of delight.

"I have both your horses here safe and well," said Luigi, to his friend the Count, as they proceeded to the stable to inspect them. "I went to Verona for yours, my Lord."

"Luigi," you must not call me 'my Lord' any more," said the Count, laughing, "you will have a title yourself by and by."

There was a smile on the youth's handsome features as he looked up into the Count's face, saying, at the same time—

"The only title I aspire to is that of retaining the regard and protection of the Count St. Felix, and being called his friend."

"*Mon Dieu*, Luigi, I hope to style you my brother-in-law; at all events little Leta has promised me her hand. Thank the fates! it was

before she knew she was a countess in her own right—or—”

“A what !” cried Luigi, looking a little bewildered, “a countess !”

“Neither more nor less, Luigi,” returned the gay Count, laughing heartily, as he entered the stable and saw the two horses in fine condition. “You must look out for another horse, Luigi,” continued the Count, “for we shall start for Venice to-morrow, and also endeavour to find a couple of strong able young fellows. I would arm them and mount them. We have to pass through a track of country not very remarkable for the honesty of its inhabitants, and besides, who knows that the amiable Duke of Malamocco has not, even now, an eye upon us. Was there any stir made after the burning of his castle ? It’s a great pity, between ourselves, he was not in the middle of it himself. It would have saved us a world of trouble, and allowed us to go back to our mistresses at once.”

“It created a mighty stir in the country,”

said Luigi; "and I heard that an officer arrived from Venice with orders from the Governor of Brescia to exterminate the outlaws on the mountains; to shoot them down like mad dogs; but, if possible, to capture their leader, Gataro, alive, and send him chained to Venice. A numerous force was sent into that district, and many of the outlaws and brigands were shot without mercy; but Gataro escaped. It is said, the Duke himself is expected in Brescia to investigate more minutely the affair of burning and plundering his castle."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed the Count, with much animation, "I wish we may be lucky enough to meet his Excellency on the road. Do you know him, Luigi, by sight?"

"I have seen him often when he resided at the castle. He is a tall, powerful, handsome man, with a dark scowl perpetually on his brow."

"Well, you must come with me into the town, Luigi. I must procure you other garments than those of a mountaineer; and, as we go along, I will tell you the history of your

parents—a tale that will rather astonish you, I fancy.”

Luigi was indeed astonished to find himself transformed into a Milanese noble ; at least he had every claim to the title, and the Count made no doubt but that his claims would be established.

“I have always heard my grandmother say,” remarked Luigi, “that our family was as good, if not better, than many in the land ; but I paid very little attention to her observations. I also remember hearing her say, that after my father’s death, the steward of the Duke (Peretti was the man) unjustly possessed himself of a chest containing papers of some consequence, and that she had no power to force him to restore them. Doubtless, those papers Gataro possessed himself of in the castle were some of them. But if it turns out that I become possessed of the title and property of my grandfather, I should still wish to serve for two or three years in the army, to gain some knowledge of society, otherwise I should feel ashamed of myself.”

“Then you need not, Luigi, for you have been well brought up by the worthy Padres. All you want, as you say, is a little confidence, and two or three years of active service will do that and much more, depend on it. I think you have imbibed too good and virtuous principles to be easily led astray. But before you think of service, you must spend a few months with me in Languedoc, where my ancestral castle is, and of which, please the Fates, your sister Leta will be the mistress—unless the little countess should change her mind with her rank.”

“No fear of Leta’s changing; I knew the secret of her heart before she knew it herself.”

“I did not give you credit, Luigi, for such penetration, in affairs of the heart at all events. But look, there is a dealer in horses, let us see what he has to sell amongst his stud.”

After looking over the dealer’s horses, the Count selected a handsome bay horse for Luigi, and two very serviceable hacks; for the three, the owner asked a most exorbitant price, but ended by taking half his original demand. In

the horse dealer's establishment the Count perceived several stout, active youths, and, on making enquiries, he found he could engage two to accompany him to Venice. He at once selected a couple and agreed to their terms. So everything was put in train for their departure the following day.

After having made several purchases for Luigi, they returned to the hotel, and made the Marchese acquainted with their proceedings, with which he was greatly pleased. In this way everything was arranged for departure about mid-day on the morrow.

came this road instead of the lower, the way we travelled in going to Peschiera, avoiding Vicenza. But who have we here entering the valley through the other gap?"

They all looked in the direction remarked by the Marchese, and saw coming towards them a party of horsemen nearly double their number. As they came nearer, they perceived that there was but one cavalier, the rest were armed retainers. As they looked, Luigi Fremessi turned pale, and a moment after became deeply flushed, as spurring up alongside the Marchese d'Obizzi, he said—

"Yonder cavalier is the Duke of Malamocco. I know him well, and the livery of his retainers."

The words and the name of his mortal enemy went through the brain of Ferdinando d'Obizzi like a burning iron.

"Is it so?" exclaimed the Count St. Felix, in a voice of exultation, "then the day of reckoning is come. Ferdinando, rouse yourself; your mortal enemy is at hand."

The Marchese had checked his horse with

so powerful a jerk, that the animal went back upon its haunches. The name of Bertran de Trevisano was like an electric shock, but it was as brief as it was great. The next moment he was perfectly self-possessed. Both parties met on the narrow causeway by the black pool; and the Duke, who was splendidly attired and armed, suddenly checked his noble steed, when he beheld the three cavaliers block the road. He had never seen his mortal foe, but the moment his dark eyes rested on Ferdinando d'Obizzi, who rode close up to him, he knew who he was, whether from the prompting of the heart—that mysterious and unknown feeling, that so often foretells what we dread, or whether from his great likeness to his father we cannot say—but the Duke at once knew he beheld the son of the woman he had so foully murdered.

“We have met at last, Bertran de Trevisano,” cried the Marchese, in a tone stern and full of terrible meaning. “Vile, cowardly murderer of a helpless female, and that female my mother; we have met for the first and last time.”

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The Marchese had checked his horse with

so powerful a jerk, that the animal went back upon its haunches. The name of Bertran de Trevisano was like an electric shock, but it was as brief as it was great. The next moment he was perfectly self-possessed. Both parties met on the narrow causeway by the black pool; and the Duke, who was splendidly attired and armed, suddenly checked his noble steed, when he beheld the three cavaliers block the road. He had never seen his mortal foe, but the moment his dark eyes rested on Ferdinando d'Obizzi, who rode close up to him, he knew who he was, whether from the prompting of the heart—that mysterious and unknown feeling, that so often foretells what we dread, or whether from his great likeness to his father we cannot say—but the Duke at once knew he beheld the son of the woman he had so foully murdered.

“We have met at last, Bertran de Trevisano,” cried the Marchese, in a tone stern and full of terrible meaning. “Vile, cowardly murderer of a helpless female, and that female my mother; we have met for the first and last time.”

The Duke's face was fearfully pale, his lips pressed together, expressing a deadly purpose; while his eyes glared in his head, as they rested fascinated upon those of Ferdinando. But before the Marchese uttered the last word, with a fierce, fiendish laugh, he tore a pistol from his holster and fired full in the face of his foe. The ball grazed Ferdinando's cheek, drawing blood, and knocking the plumed hat from the head of the Count St. Felix, who was close behind.

"By Heavens!" shouted Francis St. Felix, drawing a pistol from his vest; but before he could use it Ferdinando d'Obizzi had drawn his, and aimed it at the Duke, but the Duke's horse rearing violently received the ball in his head and fell over dead with his rider.

The eight or ten attendants of the Duke were paralysed at first, but seeing their master and his horse fall, they drew their swords and attempted to rush upon the small party before them. But the Count St. Felix very gallantly aided by Luigi and his two attendants, spurred fiercely at them, and with great ease drove them

back, telling them not to interfere, for this was a *duello* between the two gentlemen, and must not be interfered with.

While this was doing, the Duke had regained his feet and, with his sword drawn, rushed upon the Marchese, who had dismounted ; and thus, face to face, mortal enemies, stood two of the best swordsmen, probably, in the Venetian dominions.

The Duke was still in his prime and in full vigour and strength, being at this period not more than forty-seven years old. Confident in his unrivalled skill with the sword, having tried the best masters of fence in the three most polished Courts in Europe, and never meeting his equal but once, he faced his youthful antagonist with a fierce and savage determination of slaying him, as he did his unfortunate mother.

Awed by the determined manner and activity of the Count St. Felix, and possessing no fire-arms, the retainers of the Duke remained in a group, gazing in strange curiosity upon the scene before them ; while the Count and Luigi,

with their drawn swords and cocked pistols, stood, with their two attendants, with their attention intensely fixed upon the two deadly enemies as they commenced their furious assault.

From childhood Ferdinando d'Obizzi's plaything was a sword. As he grew in years, his strength and power were remarkable, and, passionately attached to every species of warlike weapon, he early astonished his comrades by his skill with the sword. Thus he stood to oppose the Duke, possessing equal skill and more youthful strength and activity.

The Duke did not expect to meet his equal with the sword, but after a few passes he became aware of his being matched. Too well he knew it would be a death struggle, and that one or the other could only leave that spot alive.

The lookers on were breathless with excitement; for never, the Count St. Felix confessed, did he witness so splendid a passage of arms with the sword. The weapon used was the favourite one of the period, the small sword of

highly-tempered steel. For several moments no advantage appeared on either side ; though the Duke burned with a devouring rage and a consuming thirst for the life-blood of his antagonist, he was outwardly calm and collected, and, with a keen and watchful eye, marked every turn of his enemy.

Ferdinando d'Obizzi's feelings fully equalled those of the Duke in intensity ; but the sight of his mother's murderer caused such a terrible effect upon his frame, that outwardly he was not near so calm as his dangerous foe. At length a slight stumble, from a pebble in the road, gave the Duke an opportunity to slightly wound the Marchese in the side ; an exclamation of intense delight burst from his lips, as he rather eagerly attempted to follow up his success. But the slight wound instantly restored to the Marchese his usual coolness and caution, and after two or three splendid passes that drove the Duke back a pace or two, his sword passed under that of his antagonist, and came with the point full against the breast of the Duke.

“By Jove, it is done!” exclaimed St. Felix, starting a pace forward. Not so; the point of the Marchese’s sword came with tremendous force against the chest of the Duke, but it encountered a shirt of mail, one of those beautiful and perfect works of the Milan armour formed of minute rings of steel. The sword bent till the hilt nearly touched the point, and then snapped with a sharp report. An exciting laugh broke from the lips of the Duke, as, raising his sword, he shouted—

“Die, villain, by the same hand that slew your mother.”

The Count St. Felix was springing forward, horror-struck at the position of his friend, when Ferdinando boiling with rage, rushed fiercely on the Duke, receiving the thrust of the sword through the flesh of his left arm, and seizing his foe in a grasp, terrible in its power, raised him from the ground.

Dropping his sword, the Duke drew his dagger and strove to bury it in the heart of his enemy; but only succeeded in inflicting a deep wound in the shoulder. The next instant,

with a force rendered tenfold greater by the consuming desire for vengeance, Ferdinando d'Obizzi tore him from the ground, notwithstanding his struggles, and reaching the brink of the black pool, hurled the body of the Duke over the steep precipitous rock into the dark waters of the pool beneath ; himself nearly following, merely saved from doing so by a powerful effort.

The horror-struck attendants of the Duke rushed forward with a cry of fear.

“ Back, villains! or by Heaven,” shouted the Count, “ I will slay the first man that moves a yard,” and with his cocked pistol in one hand and his sword in the other, he stood with his two attendants ready to follow up his words ; for Luigi gazed on, suddenly appalled by the scene before him.

Ferdinando d'Obizzi regained his feet, the blood streaming from his wounds, his face ghastly pale, his glance fixed upon the body of the Duke, which striking against a pointed rock, half stunned him before reaching the

water. The next moment a bubble on the surface, and the circles spread over the before still waters, leaving no trace where perished Bertran de Trevisano, last Duke of Malamocco. His tomb was in the "Devil's Bowl," a fitting place for the murderer's grave.

Appalled by the scene, all those witnessing it stood, for the moment, like statues, staring at the spot where the body of the Duke had disappeared ; but, suddenly rousing themselves, the retainers with one accord rushed to their horses, mounted, and galloped rapidly back on the road they had travelled in the morning.

"Good Heavens ! you are bleeding fast from several places, Ferdinando !" exclaimed the Count, anxiously clutching the arm of his friend, who still stood rooted to the spot, gazing with an intensity of thought upon the still waters of the pool, where lay his relentless foe. Where now was his rank and wealth and power, instead of the gorgeous tomb in the church of Sta. Maria Gloriosa de Frari testifying to posterity the resting place of the remains of the great Duke of Malamocco?

“A fitting tomb,” said the Marchese as he turned away, “for the foul slayer of a helpless woman. Shade of my unfortunate mother! you are avenged, and without any stain attaching to the name of d’Obizzi.”

Seating himself on a rock, the Marchese, assisted by the Count and Luigi, proceeded to bind up his wounds as well as he could. They were deep flesh wounds, but neither very severe nor disabling; therefore, in a very short time he was able to mount his horse to proceed on their way.

“Those rascals of the Duke,” said Francis St. Felix, “have scampered off, leaving the rich trappings of their master’s horse a prize for the first light-fingered gentry that may come this way. I wonder what the deuce took them off in such a hurry? You seem sad, Ferdinando,” he continued, looking into the serious face of his friend; “how is this? your vow is redeemed, and with the sword in honourable fight, at least on your side, for the miserable villain took you at disadvantage; for had his hasty shot told—which by the by it very nearly

did upon me, making an ugly hole in my beaver, as it grazed your cheek—you would have been foully slain. You, therefore, cannot feel any regret at having rid the earth of a remorseless and cruel villain, especially as your vow required his death; and it might have been, but for this strange meeting, months before you could have brought about an honourable *duello*. Nay, you might never have accomplished that end.”

“I am far from sad, Francis, for the act of slaying the destroyer of both my parents; on the contrary, I rejoice in my heart that I am spared the misery the fulfilment of my rash vow might have entailed upon me and my hitherto unblemished name. I am only sad, for memory was busy within me—that man’s fate recalled my poor mother’s death struggle in the dead hour of the night, in the pride of youth and beauty, shielding on her bosom the pledge of her love, with the man she adored, and the dagger of that remorseless wretch taking her heart’s blood. Then came a vision of my ill-fated father, with the

horrid tale maddening his brain, rushing to seek death amid the weapons of his country's foes. All these visions and more, my dear friend, rose before me ; but please God they will pass, not entirely away, for I would not wish their memories or that of my dear old grandmother, to fade ; but when they do come before me, as they will, the effect will be less agonising, for I shall fancy a smile beaming on their features, for their son avenged them."

Gentle reader, though the sentiments expressed by our hero may appear somewhat contrary to the Christian feelings of the present time, yet in the seventeenth century and in Italy such feelings and actions were quite according to the age, as any reader may satisfy himself by a perusal of Italian history.

" I wonder," remarked the Count, " how this event will be taken in Venice, and how the discovery of the Duke's real wife will affect the unfortunate woman who at this time considers herself Duchess of Malamocco ; for of course

you will not allow the succession to be usurped by an illegitimate race."

"I do not covet the Trevisano estates, and will never accept them, though they come to me through fault of male heir. Neither will I permit them to be enjoyed by an illegitimate heir. The Duke's brother left two daughters, two amiable young women; by conceding a certain portion to the needy coffers of San Marco, I can easily make over to them the estates of their father.

"Though the title becomes extinct, it would not sound well, dear friend, to slay the man that stood between myself and the Trevisano properties; for the good people of the world would give a false colouring to the Duke's death, and very likely leave in the shade the real motive that led to his fate. Another thing strikes me; a handsome provision should be secured to the unfortunate lady and her children, thus fatally betrayed, though not intentionally, by the deceased Duke, for he knew not that he was married. Neither, it seems, was he aware, that the lady he sup-

posed he had ruined was still alive. Therefore a certain portion of his estates ought to go to her."

"Upon my honour, Ferdinando," cried the Count, "if you decline the estates, you will find that the worthy Council of Ten will very coolly appropriate the whole to the use of the State. It would not be the first act of the kind they have committed."

"No, nor will it be the last, I suspect. I shall not be sorry to reach Vicenza, for I feel weak. I have lost more blood than you are aware of."

"Had we not better halt at the hostelry at Cunella?" said Luigi, looking up into the pale features of the Marchese. "We have not more than half a league to go; it will be better than pushing on for Vicenza. We are not pressed for time, and the hotel is a good one."

To this proposition the Marchese was forced to assent, for he could not much longer have retained his seat on his high mettled steed. Accordingly they prepared to pass the night at the hotel, and send on to Vicenza for a

surgeon, though the Marchese protested there was no necessity, as rest was all he required. Neither could he be prevailed on to retire to his couch.

Having had his wounds washed and bandaged, he felt much relieved ; and reposing in a huge old, but well-pillowed chair by the fire, he chatted with his friends St. Felix and Luigi Fremessi while eating supper, which they had scarcely finished, and settled themselves round the blazing log fire—for the night air in early March in northern Italy, is extremely cold—when they were surprised at hearing the tramp of many horses approaching the house and come to a halt before the door. It was at this time quite dark, for Luigi tried to gaze out through the window, but was unable to distinguish objects. Suddenly the door of the chamber was thrown open and one of their grooms rushed in, saying—

“My Lords, a party of troopers surround the house ; they come to arrest us.”

As the man spoke, an officer of arquebusiers,

followed by as many men as could crowd through the doorway, entered the chamber.

The Count St. Felix seized his sword that lay upon the table; and turning fiercely round, demanded the meaning of such an intrusion; while the Marchese, raising himself, looked calmly into the face of the Venetian officer.

“We are but doing our duty, my Lord Marchese,” said the officer, looking full into the face of Ferdinando d’Obizzi. “By the Governor’s orders we arrest you and two cavaliers, whose names we do not know, but who were in your company and assisted you in slaying the Duke of Malamocco, and casting his body into the pool in the Val Cunella.”

“Well,” cried Francis St. Felix, “the rascals were not long in carrying their information to your worthy Governor.”

“You are under an error, Sir Officer,” interposed the Marchese. “The Duke was killed in a fair *duello*. I certainly tossed his body into the pool you mention; but these cavaliers had nothing to do with the affair, save looking

on. The feud was between myself and the late Duke."

"It may be as you say, my Lord," said the officer civilly enough, "but I must obey my orders, and the orders were to arrest the Marchese d'Obizzi and the two Signores with him, who prevented the Duke's retainers from assisting their Lord—How is this?" he cried. "I was told there were three Signores in this room and I see but two."

"You cannot," laughed St. Felix, "make three out of two, unless you split one of us; a species of division I should not recommend."

"Guard well the door," said the officer harshly; and then advancing, he raised the heavy curtains over the windows, and saw that one was open, and the ground only a few feet below. He bit his lip, and turning to his men, after closing the window, ordered one of them to go out and desire the sergeant to make a strict search round the premises, for one of the Signores had escaped by the window.

The Count laughed heartily, amusing him-

self with pressing the point of his sword against the floor, and making it bend nearly double.

“Your sword, sir,” said the officer, approaching; “you will excuse me, but I must do my duty.”

Bending the weapon till the steel snapped shortly in two, the pieces flying to the other end of the room, the Count said with a sneer—

“Sir Officer, you are heartily welcome to the hilt, but a good weapon I am never in the habit of surrendering to an enemy,” and he pitched the hilt contemptuously into the middle of the room.

The face of the Venetian officer flushed with passion, and his hand rested on his sword hilt; but the Marchese d'Obizzi rose from his chair and advanced towards the arquebusier saying—

“There is no need of disputing or interfering with your orders; my friend and I are quite willing to follow you to Vicenza. A few words with the Governor will explain this misunderstanding, or, if not, we must abide

the decision of competent judges. I would, however, that you allow me to remain till the morning, as I have received the thrust of a dagger from my late antagonist, and am rather weak, at this moment, for a ride of two leagues."

"I am sorry, my Lord, I cannot oblige you; my orders are to conduct you at once to the Castle of Vicenza. We will ride slowly, and one of my men shall assist you if you wish."

"It will not be requisite," said the Marchese; "though unpleasant, I can bear the inconvenience."

At that moment a man entered the chamber declaring that the Signore who went out through the window had totally disappeared, as well as the two grooms. They had entered the stables by the back way, saddled their horses and gone out through the field at the back of the hotel.

"Excellent, Luigi!" exclaimed the Count, with a light laugh, as he tossed off a goblet of wine, and assisted his friend to put on his mantle. "The boy is fast learning the ways

of the world. A caged bird sings, after all, but indifferently. Will you order the horses, Sir Officer, for the sooner my friend is at the end of his journey the better. How do you feel, Ferdinando? well enough to ride half-a-dozen leagues?"

"A little stiff, that is all. This is a curious termination to our adventure, and may lead to tedious results."

"There is not much chivalry in a Venetian Senator of the present day," said the Count, with a rather serious air, as he looked at the pale features of his friend, and feared greatly that the exertion would be very hurtful to him. "If the wise Councillors of St. Mark take it into their heads to meddle with this affair, my little Leta will have to wait for her bridal day."

In a few minutes the horses were led to the door, and the Marchese assisted to mount, and then at a slow pace, the party, followed by near a score of arquebusiers, took the road to Vicenza.

CHAPTER X.

LUIGI FREMESSI, though possessed of little worldly knowledge, was not without the natural wit and intelligence belonging to an acute and quick observant disposition. When he threw up the window in the postern of the little hostelry of Cunella to see who the horsemen were, it struck him at once they might be a party of troopers sent to arrest them by the fugitive retainers of the slain Duke ; and the moment he became aware that they were arquebusiers, and heard from behind the curtain that their purpose was to arrest them, then he thought in his own mind, "I can do much more good retaining my freedom, than shut up within the walls of a prison," so he slipped out of the window and made his way, unperceived, round to the stables, where he found the two grooms shaking with fright.

"Saddle our horses," said Luigi, to the men, "we can lead them out through the paddock ;

the night is very dark, and, perhaps, we can get out over some ditch or hedge on to the road. It is worth trying, and if you follow me you shall be well rewarded."

The men very willingly obeyed; the horses were saddled and led through the field, and with some difficulty, owing to the darkness of the night, and a deep ditch, got into the road, a quarter of a mile from the little inn.

"How many leagues do you call this place from Padua," asked Luigi, "for I was never further than Vicenza?"

"Well, Signore, if you cross the moor and avoid Vicenza, you can reach Padua in three hours—about six leagues."

"That will do; for I wish to reach Verona before to-morrow night," said Luigi. "There is nothing like being prepared; and I will set the Marchese's Lawyer to work at once, for I have his name and residence in my head. As to anything coming out of this arrest, I cannot imagine there will, except detention for a few days."

Luigi Fremessi was not in the slightest de-

gree acquainted with the Venetian mode of administering justice. On reaching Padua he sought a remote inn, recommended by one of the grooms, who was well acquainted not only with Padua, but most towns and cities of northern Italy, being in the habit of travelling through the country with his former master, the horse dealer.

After two or three hours' rest, Luigi again mounted and proceeded to Fusina, and then sent the men, with the horses, to Dolo, to remain there till they heard from him; supplying them with money, Luigi himself embarked in the passage boat for Venice.

The young mountaineer's astonishment was very great when he beheld the mighty city of the Lagunes rise before him in all her wondrous magnificence. But we must pass over the recital of either his thoughts or impressions, and follow him to the mansion of the Signore Grimani. On requesting to see the Signore, his name was demanded; but Luigi replied his name was unknown to the

Lawyer, and that he was come on business of importance relating to the Marchese d'Obizzi.

In a few minutes he was conducted into the study of the Lawyer, who was anxiously waiting his presence. Luigi bowed as the Signore Grimani keenly examined the youth's handsome features, and requested him to take a chair.

Luigi was not at a loss for words. Still he hesitated how to commence his story. The Lawyer, however, broke ground, by saying—

“I trust nothing of evil has occurred to my noble friend, the Marchese d'Obizzi; for, pardon me, I see”—and there he paused—“you look agitated and a little flurried.”

“Why, Signore,” returned Luigi, “an unpleasant occurrence has happened; though not, I fancy, of great moment. The fact is, the Marchese d'Obizzi and the Count St. Felix have been arrested by a party of arquebusiers, and—”

“Arrested!” interrupted the Lawyer, with a start, and turning somewhat pale, “arrested!

In the name of wonder, for what could the Marchese d'Obizzi be arrested by the soldiers of the State ? ”

“ For slaying the Duke of Malamocco in fair—”

“ Holy Saints ! What do you mean ? ” interrupted the Signore Grimani, starting to his feet, his whole frame quivering with agitation.

“ If you will permit me, Signore Grimani,” returned Luigi, “ I will tell you exactly how the affair took place. I do not see anything very terrible in the matter.”

“ You do not see,” repeated the Lawyer, bitterly. “ Young man you can know nothing of law and justice. But first let me hear all about this startling intelligence—and pray, may I ask, who you may be ? ”

Luigi coloured a little, and then replied, firmly, “ My name is Luigi Fremessi ; and I am honoured by being called friend by the Marchese d'Obizzi. I was present with my friend the Count St. Felix, when we encountered on the road, through the Val Cunella, the Duke of Malamocco, and eight or ten re-

tainers. The encounter began by the Duke firing his pistol in the Marchese's face. They then fought on foot, and the Marchese's sword coming against the breast of the Duke would have slain him, but he wore chain mail within his doublet. The Marchese's sword snapped, and the Duke would have savagely slain him while unarmed, but the Marchese turned aside the blow, and catching his antagonist in his arms, after a terrible struggle, hurled him into the pool in the Val Cunella, called the 'Devil's Bowl,' and there he perished."

"What a death!" exclaimed the Lawyer, quite aghast, his eyes fixed in amazement on the narrator. "Well, go on," he muttered, seeing the youth pause.

"I have little more to say. The Marchese was stabbed in several places, but not seriously injured. The Duke's retainers galloped off, and obtained an order, I suppose, from the Governor of Vicenza."

"The Governor of Vicenza!" repeated the Lawyer, in a very alarmed tone. "Do you know who the Governor of Vicenza is?"

"No, Signore, I do not."

"Worse and worse," muttered the Signore Grimani, "this is a terrible affair. I always dreamt of something of the kind; but now it is reality. Young man, the Governor of Vicenza, a Lieutenant of that district, is the Doge's son—the Count Contarini—one of the bitterest enemies the Marchese d'Obizzi can have. He is betrothed to the slain Duke's daughter, who settled upon her the entire of his Brescian property."

"But," said Luigi, in his surprise, not thinking that the Lawyer was ignorant of many things he himself had so strangely become acquainted with, "the late Duke has left no legitimate daughter, and, therefore, had no power to settle his Brescian property upon an illegitimate one."

The Lawyer fairly fell back in his chair, his mouth open, and his eyes fixed in uncontrollable amazement upon Luigi Fremessi.

"No legitimate daughter!" he repeated, "why, you are mad. He has left both a son

and a daughter. What do you mean, young man, by what you have said?"

"It may appear strange to you, Signore, but I will explain, as I am aware the Marchese d'Obizzi has no concealments from one who has been a friend of his family so many years."

The colour came back to the Lawyer's cheek at those words; but Luigi continued, and in a brief manner made the Signore Grimani fully acquainted with all the particulars of the strange events that had occurred in so short a space of time.

The Lawyer listened, perfectly astounded, and for several moments was quite incapable of reply or remark.

"This is certainly," said the Signore Grimani, when he recovered himself, "the most extraordinary entangled web I ever had to unravel. And, so, your aunt, young sir, is the real Duchess of Malamocco, and she is a nun; and does not know, even to the present moment, that she ever was a wife. Pardon me, may I ask who your father was, for that much, I find, you have kept back."

“As my claims are yet undecided,” returned Luigi, “I refrain from assuming a rank I may never possess. But thus much I may safely say; my father was the Marchese de Fremessi, who was banished by the Duke of Milan, and an attainder placed upon his estates. He died in retirement on a small farm near Peschiera.”

“You will excuse me, young sir,” said the Lawyer, who always felt great respect for rank and old family names, “if I have spoken abruptly to you, though, as you say, the attainder may never be reversed, still you are of a noble name and race; and never can be robbed of your just title of Marchese de Fremessi. But it appears that neither you nor your young friend, the Marchese d’Obizzi, are aware, that you, if what you tell me turns out correct, you are the undoubted heir to the Brescian estates; they descend to heir male, you are next of kin, being the Duke’s nephew by marriage. Had you not been born, there would have been no male heir; for there is no other branch of the Trevisano family in existence. The title dies

with the Duke ; but the great Brescian estates are unquestionably yours by right."

It was now Luigi's turn to gaze at the Lawyer with a look of bewilderment. Here were startling and extraordinary changes. A few months back, a mountaineer living on the produce of his gun, and the little his grandmother Cassalli could scrape together ; and now suddenly become the heir to great estates, and an ancient title ! The whole appeared incredible ; one thing gave Luigi great pain and inquietude, having been a spectator of the Duke's death, and cruel and bad as all men knew he was, and a murderer as well—still he was his uncle by marriage.

Luigi's first thought was somewhat like that of Ferdinando ; he would have nothing to do with the estates of the man, whose violent death he had stood by and witnessed. Something of that sort fell from his lips, in replying to the communication of the Lawyer.

" Ah," said the Signore Grimani, " your feelings may be natural, but quite useless in a worldly light. The Duke did all in his power

to destroy the honour and happiness of your aunt's life. You have not to thank him for the succession. Had he known of your existence, he would have destroyed you without scruple. But it is time enough to think of this. Let me consider what is to be done to assist the Marchese in his present terrible situation; for I tell you his position is a terrible one. The Duke was a member of the Council of Forty. He has helped the State in a time of great distress. He has powerful friends in the State; whilst the Marchese stands almost alone. The terrible power the Council of Ten wields leaves his fate hanging by a thread. No matter how fair the duel was, he met the Duke and slew him. You say there were ten or twelve retainers of the Duke present at the time; that they wished to prevent the combat, or at least, to assist the Duke, and that the Count St. Felix threatened them with instant death if they stirred hand or foot. The Count is a Frenchman, and the two grooms were your attendants. Their testimony is not worth a straw. You must

not appear in this affair at all. You could do no possible good, but much harm; for you would have to confess on examination that you knew the Duke was your uncle, though not by blood, but that he was so by marriage."

"Good God! Signore!" exclaimed Luigi, looking very pale, "all this did not strike me at the time. I have been accustomed to look upon the Duke as a cruel tyrant, and a bad man. I am sure it never struck the Marchese d'Obizzi any more than it did myself, that he was connected with me by marriage. This sudden meeting with the Duke was purely accidental, and quite out of my power to prevent."

"I am perfectly aware of all that, young sir," said the Lawyer kindly, seeing the real distress of mind the young man suffered. "I only state these matters in reference to what would come out, in case this affair is brought to trial; but forewarned is forearmed. Now, being acquainted with all the particulars, I shall proceed at once to take steps that will force the Marchese to be brought to public,

not private trial; for if left to be dealt with secretly it is not impossible"—and the Lawyer sunk his voice very low, "that the Marchese and his friend might linger many years in the prisons of the State, while his wealth would find its way into the empty treasury of St. Mark."

Luigi looked aghast.

"Do not be frightened," said the Signore, taking his companion by the hand and pressing it. "You are very young, and though, perhaps, as old in years as your friend the Marchese d'Obzzi, your knowledge of the world is recent; you must take up your abode in my mansion, and, for a time, confine yourself to it. This city is a place where the very walls have ears, and no one escapes the Argus eyes of the spies of San Marco. My daughter will do her best to make the time pass less heavily. In truth, you must remain concealed."

The worthy Lawyer had just mentioned a circumstance, that not only made the young man's cheek flush, but also made him anxiously wish himself back again in Padua, and

that was the mention of his daughter. When hunting or shooting together, Francis St. Felix had often spoken of Bianca Grimani, but much too kind in disposition, now that his love and vexation had ceased, to speak ill of her when naming her to Luigi. He spoke of her as being very handsome, and singularly fascinating in manner. He never told Luigi she had eloped with him, but in consequence of some misunderstanding they had parted for ever. He said much in her praise, and that, notwithstanding some slight failings, she was clever, and quite capable of making any man happy whom she truly loved.

Now Luigi, though a handsome and fine looking youth, and tolerably well instructed by the good monks of Lazise, was totally unacquainted with, and unaccustomed to female society, never having spoken to one in his life beyond the condition of a mountain maiden, excepting the few words to Justina, when delivering a message from Leta. Still he was far, very far, from being either awkward or clownish; for Leta, whose education had

been well attended to in the convent, possessed a natural elegance of manner that imperceptibly imparted itself to her brother in their constant intercourse. Thus in company with his own sex, Luigi did not feel embarrassed, and passed well. But to be placed constantly in the society of a young and beautiful woman, highly accomplished, and accustomed to the best society, rather startled him; his deficiencies would at once become apparent to her, and the consciousness of that would make him even worse.

But there was no help for it. The Signore Grimani proved to him the necessity of the thing. He would be ready to come forward if wanted, and the best way to secure that contingency was to keep him out of harm's way, which the worthy Lawyer did, by putting him in the way of a most dangerous enemy for a young and perfectly innocent mind, and most susceptible disposition to encounter, and that enemy was his handsome and accomplished daughter.

Whether the Lawyer had an idea that an

unsophisticated youth with a marquise in perspective—the great Brescian estates almost certain—would not be a remarkably good match for Bianca at last ; whether he had such an idea or not we cannot say, but if he had, the idea was not a bad one.

That evening Luigi was introduced to the fair Bianca, whose beauty had by no means suffered by her disappointment in the court of Cupid. The maiden had happily a very philosophical turn of mind ; after a struggle, she generally contrived to bear up against her mishaps, and yet though fickle and inconstant hitherto in her attachments, Bianca by no means possessed either a bad heart or an ungenerous disposition.

Had the Count St. Felix, when he carried her off, married her, there is no doubt she would have made a good and affectionate wife, for she really loved him ; but thinking him killed, though she deeply grieved, she in time recovered her spirits.

The Marchese d'Obizzi she would have passionately loved, had he returned her affec-

tion ; that disappointment cost her more suffering than any previous feeling, and caused her to positively decline any further renewal of love or intercourse with Francis St. Felix, who, certainly in a moment of vexation and passion, treated her ill ; for Bianca, though giddy and inconsiderate when very young, was not guilty of any lapse from virtue. Before introduced to Luigi Fremessi, her father had made her acquainted with all he knew of the young man, and also of the singular train of adventures that led to such strange results. But her father spoke of them briefly, for he was anxious and agitated, and busy devising plans for defeating the consequences that might follow the death of the Duke of Malamocco.

Bianca was greatly surprised, when introduced to the young mountaineer, which she expected to find him, for her father was too busy to think or speak of personal appearance. Though his cheek flushed, and he appeared slightly embarrassed, yet when the rather handsomely dressed young lady entered the saloon,

his erect and fine figure, simply but still handsomely attired—for Luigi had taken some pains with his dress and purchased some few articles before making his appearance in the Lawyer's mansion—showed clearly enough, that though he might have passed his life in hunting the red deer, and in other wild sports, yet the blue blood of high birth was visible in the youth's manner and appearance.

Bianca, to do her justice, had not the slightest thought of entangling Luigi Fre-messi in the meshes of love. When she addressed him—perfectly mistress of woman's tact in appreciating character—by gentleness of manner, and affecting not to see his embarrassment, she in a very short time restored Luigi to complete ease ; so much so, that before the evening was over, he found himself *tête-à-tête* with the fair Bianca, giving her a most minute account, not merely of all the events that had taken place since his first meeting with Count St. Felix to the death of the Duke of Malamocco, but also of his own previous life, and intention of seeking

service under some crowned head engaged in actual war.

Bianca was greatly interested in all she heard. There was still left a portion of her love for Ferdinando d'Obizzi, for almost the first question she asked of Luigi was, whether the Lady Justina des Lesdiguieres was very beautiful. Luigi was enthusiastic in his description of her loveliness. Bianca smiled, but the smile was not unmixed with sadness.

"And your fair sister, Leta," said Bianca, "that this gay and inconstant Count St. Felix is about to wed ; or perhaps has already wooed and won—is she as handsome as the beautiful intended of the Marchese ?"

Luigi's bright eyes rested for a moment on those of Bianca, which fell beneath his meaning glance, as he replied—

"My little sister is neither so tall nor so lovely, at least in my eyes, as the Lady Justina ; still she is considered very beautiful, and is full of high spirits, and, unlike her sweet friend, never had any sorrows to contend with. I think, in disposition, Leta and the gay and

generous Count St. Felix are well matched, and may, when this sad affair has blown over, make a very happy pair."

"Well, I sincerely trust they may," said Bianca, seriously, "for though not without faults, Francis St. Felix is a noble cavalier. As you and he passed many days together in the mountains," continued the Lawyer's daughter, and she fixed her eyes seriously on the young man's face, "did this gay Frenchman ever mention my name?"

"Signora, he did," returned Luigi, his cheek flushing. "He spoke of you in the highest terms, and regretted that a misunderstanding had broken up your—" Luigi hesitated, and then said, "friendship."

"Was that all he said?" demanded Bianca.

"Nothing more, Signora, save the praises he bestowed on your beauty and accomplishments."

"Upon my word, Signore Fremessi," said Bianca, with a pleased smile, "it will not take long to make you as accomplished a cavalier

as your friend the Count. You have learned to flatter already."

The conversation then turned upon the situation of the Marchese d'Obizzi, and thus passed the first evening of Luigi's domicile in the mansion of Signore Grimani.

CHAPTER XI.

WE must request our readers to follow us to the Ducal Palace of San Marco, some three weeks after the arrival of Luigi Fremessi in Venice.

The Doge, Carlo Contarini, was dangerously ill; in fact, his death was hourly expected.

In a chamber of the Palace, at a late hour of the night, sat four individuals; they had just left the bedside of the dying Duke, who, though he still breathed, was insensible. The four Signores were all past middle age, one of them nearly seventy. He seemed to be regarded by the other three with marked respect, for the Ducal crown was to be placed upon his brow as soon as the breath left the body of Carlo Contarini. Francisco Cornaro, a stern, hard-featured old man, was to be the future ruler of Venice. The other three were members of the Council of Ten.

The chamber in which they were seated was

one designed by the justly-celebrated Palladio, called "*Sala del quattro porte.*" The ceiling is the joint production of Palladio, Sansovino and Vittoria, Titian's picture "*La Fede,*" and others adorn the walls.

The saloon was brilliantly lighted by immense wax candles in silver gilt sconces, and on the table were a profusion of the most costly wines, preserves and confections for which Venice was then so celebrated. Thus, in one chamber of the Ducal Palace a Doge was breathing his last, while in another the Doge was to be seen feasting; yet the countenances of all the four Signores were grave and thoughtful.

"His Highness will not live till morning, my Lord Cornaro," remarked one of the Signors.

"I fear," said Francisca Cornaro, "that the Republic at this time is in a most perilous state. An exhausted treasury, a ruinous war with the Turks, and a discontented population; for though our citizens are satisfied to strip themselves of a large portion of their wealth to purchase titles of nobility, yet the principal

nobles regard the measure with disgust ; while the people look upon the men made nobles with undisguised contempt, and murmur at the continuance of a law that drains the resources of the State in men and gold."

"Nevertheless, there will be eight millions collected by this lottery," remarked another of the councillors, "and if the great estates of the Marchese d'Obizzi and those of the Duke of Malamocco, which fall to this young Marchese, be confiscated, an immense amount will go to the Treasury."

"You are not aware, then," said Lord Cornaro, looking up into the cold, unpleasing face of the last speaker, "that there is a claimant sprung up for the Brescian Estates, besides the young Marchese. By the by, I believe the Governor of Vicenza has just forwarded claims."

"His claims are not worth a ducat, my Lord," said another of the councillors. "It is altogether a most extraordinary affair. If we could have dealt with it in private, there would have been no difficulty. The Marchese d'Obizzi

and this French Count St. Felix, who were present at the murder of the Duke—”

“ Ah, my Lord,” interrupted one of those who had not yet spoken, and whose name was Valiero—and who, singularly enough, was destined, before twelve months had expired, to ascend the Ducal throne—“ If you can make it out murder, the affair will be very easily managed; but it seems the Lawyer Grimani has got up a very strong case, and, backed by a very powerful party, with the Marchese de Villassance at their head, they insist on a public trial. The Marchese’s cause has somehow become extremely popular, and the whole affair has been most industriously circulated through Venice, and is in everybody’s mouth, and the gondoliers, always a troublesome and seditious race, seem particularly to have taken up the cause of the Marchese d’Obizzi, and openly demand a fair trial and an open court.”

“ Well, let it be so,” said the Lord Cornaro, “ let him be publicly tried. There are ten witnesses to swear he stopped the Duke on the

highway, and forced him into a quarrel, and that after throwing his living body into the lake, they forcibly prevented his retainers' endeavours to rescue him from a disgraceful death. Both prisoners are now lodged in the prison of St. Mark, and the sooner this affair is brought to a close the better. The Duchess of Malamocco, I hear, is in a state of distraction."

"But, my Lord," remarked Valiero, "she, after all, is not the late Duke's wife. His real wife is a nun in the Convent of Lazise, near Peschiera. The confession of a monk, one Padre Benedette, of the Monastery of St. Benedette, who, it seems, married the late Duke to his first wife, is in the hands of the Lawyer Grimani. The marriage can positively be attested, and the Duchess is still in existence. It is a curious net, and a most cruel affair for the unfortunate lady and her children to be thus disgraced and ruined, and no blame attached to her. But have you heard, my Lord Cornara, who this claimant is that has so suddenly sprung up for the Brescian Estates?"

“The case brought forward by Grimani is this,” returned the future Doge: “There were two sisters; the late Duke married one, and an exiled nobleman, a Milanese, it appears, living in retirement near Peschiera, married the other. He died, leaving a son and daughter. Grimani brings forward the son, as the only male heir existing in any branch of the family. If the Lawyer has sufficient proof of what he states, I see no earthly reason against this youth’s success.”

There was a silence of a minute or two, and then the Councillor Valiero said—

“I will secure a verdict of guilty against the Marchese d’Obizzi, at all events; banishment and confiscation of his entire property will follow. His wealth, from a long minority, they say is immense.”

“A good windfall for the treasury of St. Mark,” said the Lord Cornaro, with a grim smile. As he said the words, the door of the saloon was thrown open, and an usher in sable, followed by an ecclesiastic of rank, entered the room. Carlo Contarini had

breathed his last. The next day Venice beheld another aged ruler ascend the Ducal throne.

The same morning that lighted the Doge Cornaro to his throne threw its glare into those chambers of the Ducal Palace destined for the reception of prisoners of consequence. These cells were situated on the summit of the Palace of St. Mark, and were styled "Sotto Piombi;" or "Under the leads"—chambers bearing a terrible name, but only from a poet's fancy. The poet of Italy says—

"Visit the narrow cells that cluster there,
As in a place of tombs, three burning suns
Day after day, beat unrelentingly—
Turning all things to dust, and scorching up
The brain till reason fled; and with the wild yell
And wilder laugh burst out on every side
Answering each other as in mockery."

But beautiful and poetical as these lines are, such in reality was not the case with these prison cells. The fact is, the space between the lead roof and the ceiling of the cells in some parts exceeds more than twenty-six feet, whilst the nearest is quite fourteen.

Even at the period of our story, these cells were lighted by windows of sufficient size to

enable a prisoner to get out were they not protected by iron bars. From some of these windows a splendid prospect was obtained over the wide Lagune. These cells were far preferable for imprisonment than the gloomy range of vaults that flank the Palazzo San Marco, and are ranged along the dark and narrow canal that adjoins it. These miserable abodes of the wretched captives were built about sixty or seventy years previous to our tale. They were capable of containing near four hundred prisoners.

In one of the cells was confined Ferdinando d'Obizzi, and in another the still gay Count St. Felix. We say gay, for to hear him whistle and sing in his loud and cheerful voice the reader would imagine Francis St. Felix in a well-lighted and gaily-decorated saloon of the Ducal Palace, and perfectly his own master.

The cell in which the Marchese was confined was almost a square of some ten or twelve feet, with one window about eight feet from the floor. For furniture there was a strong wooden

frame containing a rough bed ; a wooden bench to sit upon, and a very small, clumsy table. These constituted the entire furniture. But the Marchese, who had quite recovered from his wounds before being removed from the Castle of Vienna, cared very little about the furniture. By standing on his table and opening his window, he could enjoy not only fresh and wholesome air, but obtain a distinct view over the vast extent of the Lagune before the Ducal Palace ; and besides this great privilege to a prisoner, he could hear distinctly the whistling and singing of his good friend the Count St. Felix, whose window opened upon the same view, and only about fifty yards distant from his own. The bars were too close to allow of his putting his head out, therefore he was forced to be content with hearing and not seeing his friend.

About six weeks after the Lord Cornaro became Doge of Venice, the Marchese was standing on his table, the window open, and the soft, balmy breeze from the Lagune came pleasantly to the brow of the prisoner—for it

was now the first of May, and the fresh air was delightful; the sun slightly obscured at intervals by slight gossamer clouds, that, gliding over the blue expanse, give so much beauty to scenery at times; the water rippling under a blaze of glorious sunshine, then lost in shadow; the numerous barques gliding swiftly before the breeze, or tacking and crossing each other in endless variety of position; but all picturesque and beautiful, as shadow or sunshine fell upon their lofty sails.

The jailor entering the cell with his daily meal, brought Ferdinando down from his post. The man was a silent, surly being, still he neither annoyed nor disturbed his captive; but without a word went through his daily work. Ferdinando d'Obizzi very quietly sat down to eat his basin of exceedingly indifferent soup, and a loaf of tolerably good bread. That he was distressed and annoyed by his prolonged captivity, there was no disguising. Still, his mind was undisturbed, and he felt his conscience clear in the matter to which he owed his captivity. He knew his Justina was safe, and

under the protection of her father ; and of her love and fidelity he felt confident. So far he was happy, and imagined he no longer possessed an enemy in the world. Therein he was wrong ; therefore he trusted each day would bring his captivity to an end, as an investigation must take place. He also very strongly suspected that Luigi Fremessi had not fled without some purpose, and he almost at once came to the conclusion that the youth would seek an interview with his Lawyer, Grimani, being quite aware that he conducted all his affairs.

With some thoughts of this kind running through his mind, the Marchese took up his loaf, and broke it in halves, when, to his great surprise, a small piece of folded paper fell on the table. Taking it up and unfolding it, he read with astonishment and no little uneasiness, the few lines it contained, which were as follows :—

“ If you will venture to attempt an escape, there are friends to assist you ; we greatly fear you will be removed to the vaults of the public prison, and remain for months, and

perhaps years, unnoticed. Your escape is almost certain if you dare make the attempt. If you consent, hang something white to the bars of your window this evening, an hour before sunset.

“A FRIEND.”

Ferdinando read the note several times ; he felt uneasy, if not seriously alarmed. He knew too well the uncertainty of a prisoner's fate, once under the power of the terrible tribunal of Venice. Innocence was no shield. Guilty or not guilty, if it suited State policy, little was thought of sacrificing a few victims. He then thought of his poor friend St. Felix, in captivity for his sake. What would be his fate ? If he could obtain his own liberty, he might negotiate, from a safe place, for his release from prison.

After two or three hours of anxious thought, he resolved to accept the offer of his unknown friends. Accordingly at the appointed time, he took a white handkerchief, and, opening the window, hung it to the bars.

To the right of the Marchese's place of con-

finement was a range of windows belonging to the chambers of the various functionaries belonging to the prison establishment. Beneath these windows, some thirty feet, was a long range of leaded roof, projecting ten or twelve feet. This roof covered a gallery. From this roof to a large square cistern, full of water, was a descent of five and twenty feet. A door opened from a corridor upon this cistern, and from this corridor several flights of stairs communicated with a lower range of apartments, and these communicated with the grand saloons of the Ducal Palace.

Now, from one of the windows above mentioned, about half-an-hour after sunset, a man, covered with a long mantle and masked, looked out, and turning his gaze along the range his attention was caught by the white cloth hanging to the bars of Ferdinando d'Obizzi's window. A low chuckle of satisfaction escaped the mask's lips, and he muttered in a low tone, "Benissimo, the kestrel is caught on the line. I will put him where he will not expand his pinions in a hurry," and closing the window he

left the room ; and walking along a corridor, he entered a chamber where a man in the attire of a jailor was standing, ticketing a number of keys. The man turned round, as his visitor closed the door, and bowed most humbly. The stranger threw aside his mask and sat down, disclosing the features of the Count Valiero, one of the Council of Ten, and one of the three, whom we before mentioned, destined to become Doge of Venice.

Now this Signore was resolved, from secret motives of his own, that Ferdinando d'Obizzi should not be brought to public trial, for he was satisfied if he could prevent that, his entire property and estates would be confiscated and the Marchese himself banished or immured for life. If the Signore Valiero had been seconded in this resolution by his colleagues, there would have been no difficulty in removing him at once ; but six out of the ten councillors insisted that the Marchese and the Count St. Felix should be openly and fairly dealt with.

And what motive, it may be asked, had Count Valiero for thus wishing to crush a man

who had never injured him. Self interest was his motive. Count Valiero was always considered one of the most extravagant and arrogant nobles in Venice, and, even for that period of lavish expenditure in keeping a numerous body of servants and retainers, was considered ostentatious and over sumptuous in his retinue and expenditure.

A great friend and companion of the late Duke of Malamocco's brother, when his extravagance exceeded the revenue of his large estates, he applied to him for assistance, and the Duke at once lent him an immense sum, taking a mortgage on his estates at a very low rate of interest. When the Duke died, the mortgage still existed, for it would have beggared the Count to repay it at that time. On Bertran de Trevisano succeeding to the title and estates, Count Valiero became uneasy, thinking the next heir might call in the sum borrowed; but as the Count Valiero had just become one of the Council of Ten, and the youngest of them all—for he was not more than

fifty-nine—it was not the policy of Bertran de Trevisano to demand the amount lent by his brother. On the contrary he corresponded with the Count, lowered the rate of interest, and completely secured the goodwill of the Councillor to help him in his ambitious views.

It may, therefore, not appear extraordinary that Count Valiero should feel a bitter enmity to the man who not only deprived the Duke of life, but who he considered at the time was the next heir to the Duke's estates; that is, when the discovery was made that the lady who passed for his Duchess was not so in reality. Another claimant sprung up for the Duke's estates; this new heir's title he doubted. At all events he determined to remove the Marchese d'Obizzi out of the way, for by careful enquiries, and other means, he discovered that the new claimant, the Marchese Luigi Fremessi, was in the first place a foreigner, and in the next, that he was, if not an actual abettor in the murder of the Duke, at all events was present, and assisted the Count St. Felix in driving back the retainers of

the Duke, thus leaving him at the mercy of the Marchese d'Obizzi.

Several persons, provided with grappling hooks and tackle of all kinds, had been despatched by the Governor of Vicenza, to drag the Lago del Diavolo, for the body of the Duke, but strange to say, after several days' trial, they had to abandon the attempt ; its depth was very great. There was, too, a strong belief among the peasantry of the district, that there was no bottom to the pool ; it was never known to overflow winter or summer. Scientific men averred that the waters of the pool went through some caverns at the bottom and came out somewhere else, most likely into the Lake of Garda. Be this right or wrong, the body of the Duke was never found.

We return to the chamber in the upper story of the Palazzo San Marco, where we left Count Valiero seated in the room with one of the turnkeys of the prisons of "Sotto Piombi."

"Have you removed Mateo Bertini and Castago to the lower range?" demanded the Councillor.

“They were removed, my Lord,” returned the man, “and replaced by those you named. Castago grumbled because, it seems, his wife and niece are rather soft-hearted and apt to interfere in the treatment of the prisoners.”

“Then it was high time to remove them,” returned the Count Valiero, with a dark frown on his brow. “I always said it was bad policy to let women reside within reach of the prisoners’ entreaties. However that is not the question. You must prepare everything so that it will appear that these two prisoners effected their own escape. If done cleverly you shall receive the advancement you covet. These men are guilty of the crime of which they are accused, and yet they may escape the punishment they deserve if brought to trial.

“You must have half-a-dozen of the turn-keys of the prison vaults in the same gallery to seize them as they pass; they are both powerful men, though without weapons. Once lodged in those vaults they will never be enquired after. They will be thought to have

escaped ; and sentence will at once be passed upon them. They will be outlawed, and their estates confiscated to the use of the State. Mind, their names must not be mentioned. Let them be gagged till they are lodged in their cells. Six months will elapse before another investigation takes place—Ah ! who is that at the door ?” said the Councillor, starting to his feet and replacing his mask.

“I did not hear any one, Count,” said the man going to the door, which to his surprise he found not quite closed ; he pretended not to notice the circumstance, but went out and looked, rather startled, down the gallery ; there was no one to be seen. Fancying, therefore, that the Count Valiero had not closed the door, he returned into the room, saying—

“There is not a soul in this gallery, Count. I heard no noise.”

“It was fancy,” said the Councillor. “Well, you perfectly understand what you have to do ; therefore no more need be said. Commence your operations after midnight, when all are retired.”

"Between one and two in the morning, Count, is the best time."

"I think so," rejoined Count Valiero.

Ferdinando d'Obizzi, in the meantime, passed the day plunged in thought. Liberty was dear to him and confinement fearful. Yet it struck him that to attempt to escape was to criminate himself; for if he was innocent, the public would say, "why should he fly?" But the captives in the prison of St. Mark rarely received justice. A terrible and secret power warped and destroyed the equity of the law. Once an inmate of the lower dungeons no matter what was the crime of the victim, it was seldom or ever he again beheld the light of heaven. This is no fiction, for the pages of Venetian history abound with instances of unrelenting cruelty and treachery.

The penalties which the Council of Ten might inflict were left solely to their discretion—death either public or secret. Each member might of himself take all the steps preparatory to a judgment, but a definite sentence could only be pronounced by their unanimous voices.

The dungeons of the Sotto Piombi, or those fearful ones beneath the level of the canals, were placed entirely at their disposal. Thus the three Inquisitors, selected from the Ten, were gifted with the most extraordinary and fearful power.

The elements of this tribunal were secrecy and terror. Even if an accused party, *after* arrest, should escape condemnation, he never learned his acquittal and release by a direct sentence.

The Marchese thought over these matters, for he was aware such things existed. He also knew that the treatment of persons obnoxious to the Council of Ten, who possessed high birth, great wealth and family influence, was often terrible; it being considered bad policy to release them *after* arrest; and equally impolitic to put them to death, for fear of the power of their connections. The jailor was instructed to pretend to favour their escape, and then in their last meal administer a slow poison, leaving no trace of action; so that when death did come, it would not be charged upon the Inquisitors.

These State secrets had been told to the Marchese by his old tutor, Padre Geronimo, once a Venetian nobleman and an Inquisitor of State ; but whose wrongs, and the cruelty he suffered, caused him to hate and execrate Venice and her councillors.

It was not, therefore, very extraordinary that Ferdinando d'Obizzi should feel somewhat uneasy both with respect to his captivity and the project of escaping from it. Certain it is, that when the last meal for the day was placed upon the table by a strange jailor, he determined to refrain from tasting it ; for the words of the man as he closed the door, showed him that he was concerned in the attempt to free him from captivity ; for, as he retired, he said in a low voice—

“ Be prepared not to sleep to-night.”

We must, however, leave our hero and his friend the Count to encounter the perils and vicissitudes before them, and return to France to the Chateau Lesdiguieres.

CHAPTER XII.

IN the Chateau Lesdiguieres, the Marquis and his still beautiful wife were like young lovers in their reunion after so many years of bitter trials. They were never weary of rambling alone amid the beautiful gardens and plantations that encircled the house, recounting to each other a thousand minute events and circumstances recalled to their memories by their reunion. Scenes of their first love rose before them, mingling with the sad events that followed, which would at times intrude but rapidly fade away before the reality of the happiness they then enjoyed.

Justina and Leta, arm in arm, wandered through groves and bowers, becoming daily more attached to each other. They had no secret or thought to hide the one from the other. Each knew the other loved fondly and devotedly; and each strove to keep up the spirits and the hopes of the other. Still, Jus-

tina was depressed, despite of all her own or her friend's efforts. The uncertainty she remained in with respect to her lover's future proceedings was terrible. The neighbouring nobility all visited at the Chateau ; all vying to show their respect for the Marquis, and all delighted with his beautiful wife, and no less lovely daughter and her equally fascinating friend.

After a time the Marquis felt obliged to give *fêtes* and *réunions*. His Chateau became filled with the *élite* of Provence, and many gay cavaliers were attracted and enslaved by the beauty of the two maidens. But the Marquis took care to let it be understood that both the fair girls were betrothed, which caused, not only considerable surprise, but great disappointment.

The Marquis's early life was unknown, as well as his wife's. He was known to be a younger branch of the family, and succeeded to the estates by the deaths of the older branches. It was thought he had passed his life in Italy and there married and resided till

recalled by succeeding to the title and estates. His handsome person, and amiable disposition and great generosity to his vassals, caused him to be much beloved. His wife and daughter soon made themselves not only respected but loved.

In this manner, receiving visits and returning those which the Marquis deemed necessary, passed several weeks and months; and then the inhabitants of the Chateau began to experience great uneasiness at not receiving any kind of intelligence from Italy.

At this period all intercourse between distant countries was carried on by means of couriers; for though posts were then established on a very feeble scale throughout France, yet they did not extend into other countries. Both the Marchese and the Count had promised to send a courier on their reaching Venice, and not a line of intelligence had they forwarded. News of all kinds travelled slowly, whilst private intelligence and events travelled not at all beyond the place, or the vicinity where they occurred. So painful became the state of uncertainty they

lived in, and so deeply did Justina take it to heart, that the Marquis permitted his attached foster-brother to once more traverse Italy to Venice and endeavour to learn some tidings of the Marchese and the Count St. Felix.

Stefano eagerly accepted the undertaking, by sailing from Marseilles to Leghorn, crossing afterwards to Ravenna, and then by sea to Venice. Accordingly furnished with abundant funds and letters, Stefano departed, promising, if nothing adverse occurred, to return in less than a month.

Every day, every hour was counted from the period of Stefano's departure, by the anxious maidens, as well as by the Marquis and Marchioness. Stefano was furnished with letters to the French Ambassador, so that every protection would be afforded him, if necessary. The month went by, and their anxiety redoubled. Another week, and then Stefano returned.

Fortunately he saw the Marquis before any one else was aware of his having landed in France. He encountered him one morning

while he was proceeding to Aix. The Marquis was overjoyed to see his faithful foster-brother safe and sound, though he looked somewhat jaded and his countenance serious, if not sorely troubled. The Marquis, desiring his grooms to ride on to Aix and await his coming, turned his horse's head, and rode with Stefano to a small inn about a mile back; and then retiring to a private room, anxiously questioned him as to the intelligence of which he was the bearer.

"I see," he remarked, "by your countenance that you have evil tidings to relate."

"In truth, my good Lord, my tidings bear a mixture of good and evil; but I fear the evil predominates. In the first place, that base man the Duke of Malamocco is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the Marquis, turning somewhat pale.

"And Ferdinando d'Obizzi is a prisoner in the dungeons of St. Mark, for having slain his mother's murderer in fair and honourable combat! Only, unfortunately he tossed his carcase into a place called the 'Lago del

Diavolo.' This was giving the devil his due with a vengeance, my good Lord."

The Marquis looked very troubled, but requested Stefano to let him hear the full particulars of his journey.

"I lost," began Stefano, "nearly five days at Ravenna owing to a violent storm that blew down the Gulf; but at last got to Venice, and went without any delay to the Lawyer Grimani. Imagine my surprise when I beheld the young mountaineer, Luigi, residing in the mansion of the Signore Grimani. The youth was overjoyed to see me. I gave the Lawyer your letters, my Lord, and then retired to the chamber of Luigi, and from him I received the account I now give you."

We need not tire the reader with a recapitulation of events. We therefore continue Stefano's account after Luigi's recital of those occurrences.

"'And what is to be done now?' I demanded of the Milanese, for it seems Luigi has a great chance of regaining his father's title and property."

“I rejoice to hear it,” interrupted the Marquis des Lesdiguieres ; “he is a fine spirited and generous youth ; and his sister will adorn her future station. She is greatly admired by all ranks, and only that her heart is with the gay and generous Count St. Felix she might marry the highest in Provence.”

“Well, my Lord, I found that the Lawyer Grimani was exerting all his skill and interest to get the prisoners tried by the Council of Forty. The Marchese’s story and misfortunes have become quite popular in Venice. The worthy Lawyer has taken, secretly, very clever means to keep the affair before the public. The gondoliers, the most formidable body in case of tumult in Venice, are quite uproarious about bringing the Marchese to a public trial. It seems the Marchese was very kind to one of their class, an old follower of his father. He settled a handsome annuity on the man. He met him by chance plying his avocation on the canal. This man had great influence with his class, and in consequence the Marchese is very

popular. It also seems he did many kind and charitable acts to others while in Venice.

“Then, again, the state of Venice is critical, and not only requires money but men to man the galleys. So, altogether, the Lawyer Grimani has strong hopes of getting the prisoners publicly tried and acquitted.”

“Never believe it!” said the Marquis, bitterly; “once arrested, a nobleman of his wealth and consequence will never escape without condemnation and confiscation of property, if not worse. I will accept, instead of declining Cardinal Mazarine’s offer, or rather commands.”

Stefano looked into the Marquis’s face a little puzzled.

“You do not know what I mean, Stefano. I will explain. When I met you I was going to Aix, to meet the Baron de Graseux. You must know that Cardinal Mazarine has determined to send a squadron of ships of war to the aid of Venice. When in Paris, two months ago, he spoke to me of this, and asked me if I would go as an especial Envoy to Venice,

my long residence in Italy giving me a great insight as to the policy and opinions of the Italians; for he said he had heard I had resided in Venice some time. I coloured a little, though it was very evident he knew nothing of my having resided there under the name of Juven. Nor was he at all aware of my misfortunes. So I merely said, ‘Your Eminence, I have only returned to my own country after an absence of nearly twenty years.’

“‘This affair will not occupy you a month,” interrupted the Cardinal. ‘I wish a man of rank thoroughly understanding the language and peculiar habits of the Venetians to accept this office. Spain will also furnish a squadron of ships for this war, and the power with which I shall invest you will be so great that the wise Councillors of St. Mark would grant, if you wished it, any request you might ask. But I will explain my motives more fully. I will send the Baron de Graseux to Aix shortly, and he will explain everything.’

“I bowed and retired, determined in my own

mind, to back out of this affair ; but now I am resolved to accept the offer."

Stefano looked thoughtful for a moment, and then said with a pleased smile—

"You are right, my Lord ; you will be quite safe in accepting it. The only man you might have feared—I mean the Duke of Malamocco—is dead. No other person now living will recognise in the French Envoy the Marquis des Lesdiguieres, the Balthazar Juven of twenty years since. No, and if they did, they dare not touch the Envoy of Mazarine. Moreover, if you are invested with the power he says, you may save the Marquis and his friend."

"Good, I am determined, and will take all my family and suite ; for a war galley will be placed at my disposal at Marseilles. Go on to the Chateau ; let them all hear your adventures, and my determination of proceeding to Venice. But make as little as you can of the peril our friends are in. I go on to meet the Baron, at Aix, and shall not return till to-morrow."

We must be brief in this part of our narrative, as our space draws to a close.

Before a fortnight elapsed, after Stefano's return to the Chateau de Lesdiguieres, the Marquis and his whole family, accompanied by the Baron de Graseux, invested with full powers from Cardinal Mazarine, embarked aboard a noble war galley which immediately got under weigh for Venice; and after a favourable voyage of fourteen days cast anchor before the Ducal Palace of St. Mark, just four days previous to the events recorded in our last chapter, and there we must leave them, and return in our next chapter to our hero, whom we left anxiously awaiting the hour that was to restore him to liberty.

CHAPTER XIII.

FERDINANDO D'OBIZZI, though his supper was placed upon the table by his jailor, determined not to touch it; preferring abstinence to running the risk of poisoning himself, should such a design enter the heads of his jailors. He continued to pace the narrow limits of his cell long after the usual period of seeking his rest, expecting each moment to hear the key turn in the lock.

At length, as the great bell of the Fosca tolled the hour of one, the fall of the bolts and then the key turned in the lock, the door was opened cautiously, and the jailor entered the cell, closing the door. The Marchese perceived that the man carried two coils of rope. The jailor looked at the untouched food upon the table with a grim smile; saying, as he laid his ropes and bar upon the floor—

“So you were afraid to eat, Signore Marchese, but you need not; we don't spice our

lodgers' food of late years. We have grown humane."

The Marchese made no reply, but regarded the man's manœuvres with some surprise. Pushing the table under the window, he mounted on the top of it, and having his hand protected by a glove, he commenced sawing the bars of the window with the fine saw he held in his hand. After very few minutes' work, he coolly requested the Marchese to hand him up the crowbar, which he did, and then the man inserting the crowbar between two snapped one off at once. The same process was adopted with the other.

"Now, Signore, the rope if you please. You see," he continued, "I intend making it appear you went out through this window. A very active man, from the roof below, by sliding down a huge iron spout that projects from the roof might gain a footing on a cistern below. From thence I must furnish another rope, but we need not try the method I am explaining, it is rather a dangerous

amusement. We will try an easier mode, for I have to perform the same manœuvre in your friend the Frenchman's cell."

Ferdinando felt his heart beat joyfully that his friend St. Felix was also to be liberated. The jailor having fastened the rope, and flung the rope out of the window, took up the remainder of the tools, and requesting the Marchese to follow with the lamp, both left the cell. The jailor then locked, bolted and barred the door carefully.

The Marchese perceived they were now in a long, narrow gallery, with many doors, all on one side, the other being a blank wall. Passing about a dozen or more of these doors the jailor stopped and whispered to the Marchese—

"When you see your friend, remember, not a word to be spoken above your breath; no noise."

Unbolting the door, and then unlocking it, the jailor threw it back and entered the cell. Francis St. Felix was standing dressed in the middle of the cell, and appeared not at all

astonished at seeing either the jailor or Ferdinando d'Obizzi, but, with a bright, joyous smile, he held out his hand as the jailor closed the door, and catching that of his friend, pressed it affectionately, and whispered in French—

“Be not surprised at what you see me do, but aid me.”

The next instant, turning round as the jailor was laying down his ropes and bar, he suddenly caught him by the throat. In his grasp the man had no power to utter a sound, and though a strong man, he struggled fiercely; he then threw him over on his back, saying to the Marchese, who looked confounded—

“Give me that handkerchief and the twisted band that is on the bed; we must gag and secure this rascal, for our lives depend on it.”

Our hero, without further hesitation, did as the Count bade him. The handkerchief was thrust into the jailor's mouth, and the band crossed firmly over it, and then with some of the cord they bound his hands and feet.

While this was doing, the door was cautiously opened, and the head of a young and certainly pretty girl was protruded into the cell, and then drawn back quickly, but not before the Marchese caught a glimpse of it. He was startled, though the face was that of a female and looked exceedingly pale. Touching the Count's arm, who was very scientifically finishing a knot, he whispered—

“We are observed ; I saw a female at the door.”

“All right, she is as true as steel, and as good as she is pretty. Now this traitor is fast for the night, there is no more time to lose, so take you the bar. I will carry the rope, for we shall want it. Never mind the lamp, Jubetta has one ready.”

The Marchese could not refrain from a smile. In casting his eyes round the cell, he perceived that his gay friend had a guitar and several books lying on the table ; and the very small remains of a much better description of supper than his own, remained there.

“Humph !” muttered Ferdinando to him-

self, "my friend has been making love to this Jubetta, and turning the same love to profit. I know not what Leta may say to this fair damsel's interference."

Having fully secured the man, whose eyes actually blazed with fury and passion, they left the cell. Standing without the door was the young girl, her person wrapt in a mantle. As she caught sight of the Marchese, her cheek, before pale, crimsoned like a peony, and her long dark lashes fell over her eyes. Her hand shook that held the lamp, but the Count said in his low voice—

"Courage, Jubetta; your fidelity and faith will never be forgotten by those whose lives you have saved."

"Lock and bolt the door, Signore," said the maiden, in a low tremulous voice, "and speak not a word while you follow me."

The girl led the way along the gallery, paused a moment at the end, where a staircase led down to the second range of cells. All was as silent as the tomb; approaching the wall, she touched a secret spring, and a narrow

door, not more than eighteen inches wide, fell back, disclosing an extremely narrow flight of stairs. She closed the door after they had passed it, and once more led the way down the stairs ; at the bottom, another door, similar to the one above, let them out into a wide and handsome gallery. There were several doors leading into private chambers on each side, and on looking up the Marchese perceived that the gallery was lighted through an immense skylight.

“ These,” said Jubetta, in a low voice, “ are the private spare chambers in the Ducal Palace. Fortunately there are no guests. The gallery and part of the Palace have no communication with the cells of Soto Piombi, except by means of this secret staircase.”

At the end of the gallery, Jubetta opened a chamber door, and entered a handsomely furnished bedroom, with two large windows, and a balcony in front. She instantly shaded her lamp, and placed it in a position where no light might pass out through the windows. A very faint gleam of light came through the win-

dows, for the night, or rather morning, was very dark and misty.

“Open that window softly, Signores, you must descend into the street by the rope, which I hope is long enough.”

“Never fear, my noble-hearted girl,” said the Count, “if it wants a dozen or so feet, it matters little.”

While the Count opened the window and went out on the balcony to fasten the rope, the Marchese approached the young girl, and took her trembling hand quietly and kindly, saying in a low voice—

“Tell me, gentle maiden, how can I ever repay this deep debt of gratitude I owe you; for though I understand it not, yet I feel satisfied you have saved us from some great peril. I would fain do more than express my gratitude, but—”

“Nay, nay, Signore, lose no time in thanking me—I chanced to overhear your destruction planned—for below, in the lower passage eight men are stationed to seize you and conduct you to the vaults beneath the Canals. But,

see, your friend has fastened the rope ; go, in the name of the Madonna, go, and may Heaven preserve you both," and her voice faltered.

" Farewell, maiden," said the Marchese, accept all I now have to give—my prayers for your happiness, and my everlasting gratitude ;" and pressing the trembling hand he held most respectfully to his lips, he hastened to the balcony.

" Go first," said the Count, " the rope reaches to within a few feet of the ground."

The Marchese climbed over the balcony, seized the rope and descended, while the Count returned into the chamber, and taking Jubetta's hand in his, said in a voice of much feeling, and in a serious tone—

" May God bless you, Jubetta. You are an angel, as good and as pure as you are generous and noble. May I rot in the dungeons of St. Mark for life, if I ever forget your name or your kindness of heart—farewell," and gently passing his arm round the trembling girl's waist, he pressed a kiss upon her

lips, the first and the last, and the gay Count, with more emotion than he ever before betrayed, passed on over the balcony, and in another moment stood in the narrow street beneath by the side of his friend.

A low sob burst from the heaving bosom of the fair girl left standing in the chamber; her eyes were filled with tears, and for several moments she remained incapable of moving. Then suddenly she started forward, gazed out over the balcony, and her quick eye pierced the mist and darkness. She caught a glimpse of two dark figures passing the corner—the next moment they vanished.

“He is gone!” murmured the girl in a low, wailing voice. “Henceforth this vile place will be desolation. But I have saved him, and perhaps he will sometimes think of Jubetta.”

With a heavy sigh she pulled up the rope, untied it, then closed the window. Taking up her lamp she left the chamber, and, proceeding through the secret passage, regained the gallery above. Descending the regular staircase that led to the lower range of cells, she

paused to listen, but all was perfectly still; and passing along this gallery she came to another short flight of stairs. At the bottom, on a short platform, were three doors; she opened one, through which was a small plainly furnished bed-chamber. She locked the door, threw the rope into a little trunk, and then stood for a moment, her sweet countenance betraying the agony of her young heart; then blowing out her lamp, she cast off her mantle and threw herself, as she was, upon the bed. The remainder of that night was spent in tears and bitter thoughts.

When the Count reached the ground beside his friend, he said—

“Thank God! so far all is well. Now where shall we go, for out of Venice this night it will be impossible to get.”

“I have been thinking of that,” said the Marchese, as they moved along the narrow causeway leading to the side of the Ducal Palace into the street of the Mere. “I thought of Grimani’s mansion; but it will not do to involve him in our desperate game. I tell you

what we can do ; get into my own mansion. Old Jerome Bartlett and his spouse and daughter inhabit chambers at the gate. Jerome is an old and attached servant of my father. If we can make him hear, we shall get in. We can then consider what is next to be done."

"Well," said the Count, "at all events we shall be able to get hold of some weapons. By heaven ! they shall never take me alive again."

"And yet, Francis," rejoined the Marchese, in rather a reproachful tone, "you appear to have passed your time of captivity with less of the horrors usually attending such things."

"Ah ! you allude to that kind hearted girl," said the Count, in a serious tone. "If you think ill of her or me, you wrong us both. Another time I will explain. That I unfortunately touched her heart, which I fear is the case—you know me too well, Ferdinando, to think there is a spark of vanity in what I say—but—who comes here ? I hear the tread of feet. Stand in close to this door-way ; the mist is thick, that is lucky."

As he uttered the words, men's voices reached their ears, and then two figures, muffled in mantles, walked slowly past; one of them saying as they went by—

“They kept it up late to-night at the Ducal Palace. The French Marquis has just gone into his palace.”

“Yes,” returned the other, “there is something in the wind, and—”

The rest of the words were lost.

“Those are two of the night police,” said the Count. “It would have been unpleasant to have had to throw them into the canal; for our strange attire, and no kind of covering for the head, would have betrayed us. Now turn this way to the right, over that bridge, and we shall reach your mansion in ten minutes.”

In less than ten minutes the two friends stood before the noble portals of the d'Obizzi palace. To their extreme surprise there was a strong glare of light in the porter's chamber.

“The old man is going to bed late,” said the Marchese.

“Or getting up deuced early,” rejoined the

Count. "See! there's a light in the upper chamber."

"That is very strange," said the Marchese thoughtfully, but pulling the huge bell, which communicated with old Jerome's sleeping chamber, in a few minutes a small door in the great portals opened, and the old porter himself appeared, holding a lamp, and looking exceedingly amazed.

As the Marchese entered, Jerome held up the lamp, and the light flashed upon Ferdinando's features. With a cry of horror the old man dropped the lamp, saying in a trembling voice—

"Holy mother! The spirit of my young master."

"No, my good old man, not come to that yet," said the Marchese, closing the door, while the Count picked up the lamp, fortunately not extinguished. "But how is this that you are up and dressed at this hour?"

"Oh! my beloved master; is it really yourself? this is a happy sight," and he caught the

Marchese's hand and kissed it repeatedly. "Oh dear, oh dear, how the Marquis and the dear ladies will rejoice."

"Who are you talking of, Jerome?" demanded the Marchese, greatly surprised.

"My good Lord, come this way. I am not dreaming. His Lordship has not yet gone to bed. His own attendant is with him."

"Who is this Marquis? and what on earth is he doing in this house?"

"Holy mother!" muttered the old man, I am losing my senses. The Marquis?—why the Marquis is the good French Envoy. The Marquis des Lesdiguieres."

Had a boom exploded at the feet of the two friends, it would not have caused them to start so much as the name just uttered. They looked one to the other in silent amazement, repeating "the Marquis des Lesdiguieres—are there two—"

"No, my Lord, there are not; I should say," returned old Jerome, recovering himself.

"You spoke of ladies, Jerome, who are they?"

"The Marquis, the Marchioness, the Lady Justina, and—"

"Who?" exclaimed the Count, clutching the old man's arm, his face flushed and his whole manner excited; while Ferdinando appeared rooted to the spot.

"The Lady Leta Fremessi," said the old man, throwing open a door.

"Here's a miracle!" exclaimed Francis St. Felix.

"Here comes the Marquis's personal attendant, Monsieur Baudoni."

Both the young men paused, for they were entering the major domo's receiving chamber; and looking up beheld a well-dressed man descending the stairs, with a lamp in his hand. He wore a light coloured wig, evidently highly powdered, but notwithstanding that, and other additions to his person and face, they both recognised him as Stefano Paolo, who caught sight of them at the same moment, and for an instant seemed rivetted to the spot, his features wearing an expression of undoubted amazement. Instead of descending, he turned

round and rushed up the stairs, disappearing in the corridor.

"He knew us at once," said Ferdinando, "and has been to tell his master of our most singular appearance. We had better enter this room; and, Jerome, do not let any of the household be disturbed at this hour, for I suppose the Marquis des Lesdiguières has a number of domestics."

"He brought his whole household with him, my Lord; and had just returned from the Ducal Palace a few minutes before your Lordship's arrival."

As the old man ceased speaking, the door was thrown open and the Marquis des Lesdiguières hastily entered the room, his noble features highly flushed, and his person wrapped in a rich dressing-gown. Though Ferdinando and the Marquis had never met, they advanced towards each other with the utmost warmth and cordiality of manner; and then the Count St. Felix was introduced and his hand pressed affectionately by the French nobleman.

"I am so bewildered," said the Marquis des

Lesdiguieres, "by this extraordinary event that I can scarcely find words to congratulate you both, for I returned this very night with a feeling of great uneasiness respecting you, for I strongly suspect these deep plotting and sage councillors, with the Doge at their head, are trying to gain time and deceive me."

"The first question I must ask you, my dear Marquis," said Ferdinando, "is after the health of your fair lady, and—"

"Ah," interrupted the Marquis, pressing his hand and answering with a pleased smile, "they are all well, and when they hear what has happened this night, you may depend the effect will not be to injure their health or depress their spirits. They have not stirred out since they came to Venice. I thought it better not, therefore gave out that the Marchioness was indisposed after her long voyage."

"But pardon me," said Ferdinando, "have you no apprehension with regard to yourself?"

"None whatever," returned the Marquis.

“I came as a special envoy from Cardinal Mazarine, and with a secret object in view, confided entirely to my care to accomplish. The Doge and the Council of Ten are most eager to accede to the Cardinal's desires. But to suit my own views—and, in fact, the real object that brought me to Venice—I pretend some little difficulty lies in the way of bringing the affair to an end; but now that you are out of their power, the road is clear to me. However, as all I have to say, and all you have to tell me, will take much time, and the dawn approaches, you had better retire to enjoy a few hours' rest. To-morrow, or rather to-day, I must have a most important interview with the Doge, Cornaro. By the by,” added the Marquis with a smile, “need I apologise for thus taking possession of your palace, not by force of arms, but by the entreaties of your worthy Lawyer, the Signore Grimani, and backed by the entreaties of all the female part of my family. In fact they spend half their time in your picture gallery; tracing all kinds of likenesses to you in your ancestral portraits. By the by,

Count St. Felix," said the Marquis des Lesdiguières, "I have to put in a claim of relationship, besides that of friendship, to increase, if that were possible, our intercourse. Your mother, if I mistake not, was my mother's cousin; her name was Madaline Juven."

"It wanted nothing," said the Count, "to increase the feeling I entertain for your Lordship. I thought of that circumstance myself; but imagined you took the name of Juven, as *un nom de guerre*; I rejoice it is not so."

"Well; we will separate now, to meet again in a few hours. The Marchioness will get uneasy at my sudden disappearance. Stefano will supply you with anything you may require from my wardrobe."

"After being provided with a lodging in Sotto Piombi," laughed the Count, "for so many months, has taught us that luxuries are quite unnecessary. A soft bed will, I fear, feel disagreeable; but custom must reconcile us to the hardship of reposing on one. We will not, therefore, trouble you for anything to-

night. In the morning, our toilet will require a little embellishment."

The adventures of the night were not yet over. Just as the Marquis des Lesdiguieres was retiring from the chamber, Stefano rushed into the room, exclaiming in an agitated voice, while his face became fearfully pale—

"My Lord, my Lord, a large party of the officials of St. Mark advance along the causeway. I have been looking out from the window over the gateway ; they are tracked—"

As he spoke the great bell rang out a tremendous peal, and a loud summons with the butts of musketoon, was added against the great portal. Count St. Felix rushed into the hall and tore down from the pillars, where they were suspended, a couple of heavy swords.

"You must fly," said the Marquis des Lesdiguieres. "You must not fall into their power again. Curse them," he added bitterly, "I know them well ; they are sworn not to spare you."

"Come, my Lord," exclaimed old Jerome, as the summons for admittance was repeated,

“you have still time to escape by the back door.”

“I have it,” said the Marquis, snatching up a pen and paper, used by the major domo for making entries of visitors in a huge book ; and tearing out a leaf, he rapidly wrote a few lines, signed it, and then gave it to the Marchese d’Obizzi, who had just taken a sword from the Count’s hand, “seize the first gondola you find, pull towards the French galley. Once aboard you will be safe. They dare not insult the French flag by seizing you under its protection. Leave me to act to-morrow. Do not loiter, for God’s sake. See, the domestics are all aroused.”

Shaking the Marquis’s hand warmly, the two friends hurried from the hall, old Jerome and Stefano leading the way. In a minute or two they reached the back gate, leading out on a very narrow riva. A thick mist covered everything around, and lying on the still waters of the canal.

“The Saints keep you, my Lord,” exclaimed old Jerome, as he threw open the door. As

he did so, several officials made a rush in, to seize the persons of the Marchese and Count. Both had anticipated this; for well they knew the caution and cunning of the St. Mark officials. As they rushed in, both the Marchese and the Count stepped aside, and with incredible quickness Ferdinando d'Obizzi, who held the key, inserted it in the lock outside, and drew the massive door to with a rude shock—upsetting one of the men—and locked it, pitching the key into the canal.

“Admirably done,” exclaimed the Count, laughing, “that was better, Ferdinando, than cutting their throats. Hark! how the baffled villains kick and thunder at the door.”

“Quick, Francis, let us gain the Piazzetta; there are always gondolas there,” said the Marchese, crossing a narrow bridge and running rapidly along the causeway, into the Piazzetta of St. Mark. Reaching the quay they perceived several gondolas moored off the place.

“I must swim aboard,” said the Marchese, “and bring the boat for you. It will not do to

hail any of them, for there is always a gondolier aboard at night, to watch the boats."

"Do so, Ferdinando, for, by all the powers, I have no more notion of swimming than a stone."

The next minute, the Marchese was in the water; three or four strokes brought him to the side of a gondola. Scarcely had he touched the side, and was trying to get in, when a man rushed from out the awning, and, seizing a boat hook, would have struck the Marchese on the head had he not called out in a low tone—

"Keep quiet, man; if you wish to earn five ducats, help me in."

The tone of voice and manner arrested the gondolier as much as the mention of the five ducats. No sooner in the boat, than the voice of the Count was heard—

"Be quick; or I must try my luck to reach you or the bottom."

The next instant the Marchese impelled the boat, with the aid of the man—who began to comprehend, like all his quick-witted race, that

there was something more than ordinary in the wind—close to the quay, and St. Felix jumped in.

“I heard men’s voices at the further end of the square.”

“Now, my man,” said the Marchese, “get out quickly into the Lagune; make no noise with your oars. The mist is so thick, you cannot be seen from shore.”

“I know your voice now, my Lord,” exclaimed the man in a low but joyful tone, “the Saints be praised! you have escaped their cursed clutches.”

As he spoke, he was impelling the boat quietly out into the broader waters. It was a still, warm night, and the fog lay motionless on the Lagune. Presently, they heard distinctly the splash of oars into the water, and the Marchese whispered to the Count—

“They have again tracked us. There can be no other boat than those belonging to the police near where that sound comes from.”

The gondolier heard the sound also, and in a low voice, he said—

"Where, my good Lord, where shall I pull? I fear you are pursued."

"Where is the French galley lying? she cannot be far from this?" questioned the Marchese.

"Oh, the galley of France," repeated the man. "I can easily find her in the dark. She is not a hundred yards from us;" and bending to his oar, the gondola shot through the water rapidly.

On came a boat, evidently in pursuit, for the noise of several oars came nearer and nearer.

"The galley!" exclaimed the Count, as the gondola came full against the side of a large black mass, towering high above them, the shock throwing the Count off his balance.

"Hallo! messmates!" sung out a voice from above, with a laugh. "Do you want to sink us?"

"Hook on, hook on," cried the Count to the gondolier. "*Mon ami*," he said to the man above, "throw down a rope. We have important intelligence from the Marquis des Lesdiguières for your Captain."

“Aye, aye, sir,” returned the sailor, “shove on a little ahead, and you will have the advantage of an easy ascent.”

As they did so, they sprang nimbly up the side, gondolier as well. A long, low galley, impelled by six rowers, shot up alongside. A voice imperiously demanded—

“What ship is this?”

Several sailors now came up, and an officer of the watch. A large lantern was slung over the side of the galley.

The Count St. Felix, in a few rapid words, explained their errand to the officer, and again the words—“What ship is this?”—were heard.

The French Officer replied in a loud, authoritative tone—

“Keep off there. This is the ‘Harry the Fourth,’ the galley of his Majesty of France. What do you want?”

“You have just received some fugitives aboard your ship. We request they may be handed over to us,” replied the officer in the boat.

"You must get an order from his Excellency the French Envoy for their delivery, whoever they may be."

"I am the Chief Officer of the Police," said the voice through the mist.

"You may be the Doge himself," returned the French Officer, "but no one comes aboard this ship to search for fugitives without his Excellency's order. So good night, my friend. Let that boat sway astern," said the officer to one of the sailors. "And now, Signores, follow me to the cabin, and I will awaken Captain Rene de la Rue."

"I am sorry to disturb him at this hour," said the Marchese d'Obizzi, "but the note I have to give him will be my excuse. The affair is important."

"I can imagine so," said the young officer, "you have been in the water, Signore. We have been told to be always ready for an emergency by his Excellency's orders, and I expect one has arrived."

Leading the way the young officer conducted them into a splendid cabin. The

Count St. Felix explained at once who they were ; and requested the French Officer to get his friend dry clothing, before disturbing the Captain of the galley.

“ Mon Dieu ! Is it possible,” exclaimed the young officer, “ that this Signore is the Marchese d’Obizzi ? I will, if he will follow me to my cabin, procure him such of my clothes as will fit him, but I fear,” he added with a smile, “ he will find them rather small.”

“ You are very kind, Monsieur,” returned the Marchese, “ they will be very acceptable ; for I cannot well have an interview with your Captain, till I change these soaked and soiled garments.”

Showing the Marchese into a small, but neat cabin, the young Frenchman displayed the whole of his wardrobe for the Marchese’s selection ; who, in a very few minutes, equipped himself as well as he could ; and was then conducted into the state cabin.

Captain de la Rue was roused from his slumber, and in less than half-an-hour entered the cabin. The Marchese and the Count were

discussing the contents of a flask of wine and some refreshment that had been placed on the table of the officer of the watch ; an occupation the Marchese especially found he required, not having tasted any food for many hours ; and his cold bath had increased his appetite.

Captain de la Rue was a fine portly man, of some five-and-fifty years of age. His Officer had informed him who his guests were, and therefore he was, in a manner, quite prepared for doing all that was required ; as the Marquis des Lesdiguieres, during the voyage from Marseilles, had often mentioned to the Captain of the galley, who was a gentleman of good birth, and greatly distinguished in his profession, his anxiety about his young friends, the Marchese d'Obizzi and a countryman of his own, a Count St. Felix, both imprisoned, by order of the Venetian Government, for killing a Venetian nobleman in fair duel. He also gave a slight sketch of the Marchese d'Obizzi's reasons for slaying the Duke of Malamocco.

The consequence was that Captain de la

Rue felt much interested in the story of the Marchese and the Count; and now hearing from his Officer that they had made their escape and were in his galley, he hurried on his uniform and hastened to receive them with all the attention and kindness in his power.

While the Captain and his fugitives are making themselves mutually acquainted, and the Captain reading his Excellency's letter, we will return to the hall of the d'Obizzi's palace in our next chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Marchese d'Obizzi and the Count St. Felix, having left the hall with old Jerome and Stefano, several domestics, roused by the noise and sound of the bell, came hurrying down the stairs.

The demands for admittance still continuing at the portal, the Marquis des Lesdiguieres ordered some of the servants to open the door and demand the meaning of the uproar at that strange hour of the night.

Immediately after the gate was thrown open an Officer of the secret police entered the hall, desiring his men to stay without. He at once perceived the Marquis standing at the foot of the great staircase ; and taking off his hat, he made a low bow as he advanced, saying—

“I regret, my Lord Marquis, to be obliged to disturb your slumbers and those of your household ; but we have tracked two fugitives, just escaped from prison, into this palace.”

“Are you not aware, Sir Officer,” returned the Marquis, with great dignity of manner and in a very cold tone, “that you have committed an insult upon the Majesty of France, in thus almost forcibly intruding yourself into a mansion inhabited by a Special Envoy from the Court of France? and allowing that—”

Before he could utter another word, four men rushed into the hall from the back part of the mansion, pulling along with them old Jerome and Stefano.

“How is this, Sir?” exclaimed the Marquis, his face flushed. “What have my servants done, to bring upon them such gross treatment? Release them.”

“Release them,” said the Chief Officer. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Why,” returned the men, “that the fugitives escaped through the back door.”

“Were you not stationed there to prevent them?” asked the Officer fiercely.

“The place was so intensely dark,” returned the men; “they got past us, pulled to the door, and locked us in.”

A smile of intense satisfaction passed over the features of the French Envoy, on hearing these words, as he thought to himself—

“By this time they are safe aboard the galley.”

“Then follow me,” said their Officer, “there is no use in lingering here. My Lord Marquis,” he added, “you are the best judge whether your permitting those two fugitives to escape, or—”

“Tut, Sir,” interrupted the Marquis, haughtily, “I shall not only expect, but demand, in the name of my master, an ample apology for this unheard-of insolence.” And, turning on his heel, he desired Stefano to take the lamp, and follow him upstairs, and old Jerome to close the portals after the officers had left.

In a few minutes the gates were closed, and the astonished domestics, who had heard all the conversation, but understood nothing of its meaning, returned again to their chambers.

“It seems, Stefano,” said the Marquis, as

they ascended the stairs, "that my young friends outwitted their pursuers."

"Parbleu, my Lord; I never saw anything better done. I feared at first that blood would have been shed, knowing how readily and skilfully they both use their weapons; but, as the policemen sprang in, they both leapt aside, and in the dark the men seized Jerome and myself; and before they could rectify their mistake, the door was slammed to and locked—they were caught in a trap."

The Marquis laughed heartily, saying—

"Well, by this time they are safe aboard the French galley; they dare not search her, so now go seek some rest. To-morrow I shall have a stormy debate with his Highness, my Lord Cornaro."

The Marquis entered his chamber, and, closing the door, perceived the Marchioness nearly dressed, waiting for him in a state of intense anxiety.

"Oh, my husband!" she exclaimed, clasping his hand, "What, in the name of Heaven, was all that disturbance? What had the officer

of police to do in this mansion at such an untimely hour?"

The amazement of the Marchioness was very great when the cause of the disturbance was explained to her.

"I must go for a minute into the next room," she exclaimed, "the dear girls heard the noise, and are in as great anxiety as myself. What you tell me will be an immense relief to their minds."

Whether the inmates of the Palace d'Obizzi slept much during the remainder of that eventful night is not known; but it is very certain they had all assembled at a very early hour to breakfast. As they sat conversing on the events of the past night, a domestic handed two letters to the Marchese des Lesdiguieres. In a moment he ran his eyes over their contents, and a pleased smile told those who watched his expressive features that he read pleasing intelligence.

"All is quite right," said the Marquis, looking up. "Captain de la Rue says, if I think fit, he will get under weigh immediately, and

land the fugitives in any Italian port out of the Venetian dominion, and that no officer of the Venetian Government dare search his vessel. There will be no need of that; I am to have an interview with the Doge and several of the Councillors early to-day. This other letter, though directed to me," he added with a smile, handing it over to the Marchioness, "is evidently written with the writer's thoughts mixed up with his friend, the Count's, fixed upon certain young ladies of my family, for the only part I see particularly intended for me is to request Stefano to proceed to the hostelry, the 'Aquila Nero,' and pack up their mails and send them on board the galley. The Marchese complains that he is still fettered, as the clothes he was forced to borrow leave him with hardly the power of motion, he, unfortunately, being a foot taller than the owner."

We must now change our scene for the Ducal Palace two hours after mid-day.

We request our readers to enter with us the magnificent saloon called the "Sala del Collegio." In this chamber the Doge and his

Council received foreign ambassadors. This saloon, of noble proportions, is decorated by paintings of Paolo Veronese, of which the most conspicuous is the great historical picture of the Victory of Curzolari. In this saloon, seated in a chair of State, was the Doge Cornaro. The Count Valiero and two other Councillors were seated near, at a table on which were several papers.

The Count Valiero looked seriously troubled, and in reply to an observation of the Doge, said—

“Your Highness, I cannot unravel it. The jailor was found tied and gagged in the prison-cell of the French Count. He persists in thinking that the prisoners made their escape by means of the rope suspended from the bars of the Marchese d’Obizzi’s cell.”

“It is possible, certainly,” remarked another of the Councillors, “for a prisoner to escape thus, but it is a perilous feat.”

“Still,” said the Doge, in a thoughtful tone, “where did they get the rope? There is some

treachery in this affair. I think that jailor is a traitor."

There was a pause, and then the Doge said—

"It was a rash act of Captain Villucase to enforce an entry into the mansion of the French Envoy, situated as we are with France and Spain. It will have a bad effect, and this Marquis des Lesdiguieres is a stern and most uncompromising man. It is very strange, the incomprehensible feeling that comes over me when I look into his features—a vision of years long past rises before me, and it appears to me that I have seen that remarkable countenance before, but where or how, or in what walk of life, baffles me."

"Then what, my Lord Duke," said the Inquisitor Valiero, "is to be done finally in this strange affair? The Marchese d'Obizzi and the Count St. Felix are both aboard the French galley. We cannot take them thence; and to pardon them is quite impossible."

"Sentence them to banishment and confiscation of their property," said one of the other Councillors, in a harsh tone.

“Such a sentence, my Lord,” said the Doge, quietly, “might not only deprive us of the assistance of the French and Spanish fleets, but actually involve us with France in a serious question now pending. This Envoy is invested with great power by the Cardinal Mazarine, and he has taken this Marchese d’Obizzi’s cause much to heart.”

“His daughter is betrothed to the Marchese d’Obizzi,” said the Count Valiero, “and that is the reason.”

“There are more reasons than that,” remarked the Doge. “There is a mystery that baffles all our spies. But the hour is come; the Marquis has requested a private interview. Will you, my Lords, leave the conditions of settling this affair to me? A public trial we are all agreed must not take place.”

The three Inquisitors consulted for a minute, and then said—

“Well, your Highness, be it so; but fully pardoned, the Marchese d’Obizzi must not be. As to the French Count, it is quite immaterial what his sentence may be. But with

respect to this young Marchese Fremessi's succession to the Brescian Estates, they must be disputed, as he is only heir by marriage and not by blood, or by deed of succession. Moreover, he is a foreigner. The Marchese d'Obizzi is the rightful heir, and though for State reasons it may be necessary to banish him, still, as you object to a confiscation of his property, a large fine may be inflicted, and those large estates be saved from the grasp of a foreigner."

"I will think of that," said the Doge, "and touch upon the subject with the French Envoy. We will meet again after my interview."

The Councillors arose and left the room. Almost immediately after, the Marquis des Lesdiguières was formally announced, and ushered into the saloon.

The Doge Cornaro rose from his chair of State, and received the Marquis with studied politeness. When both were seated, the Duke first commenced the conversation by saying—

"My Lord Marquis, I have to apologise for the indiscreet zeal of one of our Officers of Police. He ought to have known that the

mansion inhabited by an Ambassador is sacred, and, however satisfied he might be that those he sought to secure had taken refuge in that mansion, he still should have refrained from such an outrage as he committed. I hope you will accept the apology, my Lord. As to the officer, he will be disgraced from his rank."

"I trust not, your Highness," returned the Marquis, "the man acted with over zeal; still, a good officer, though he may commit an error of judgment, may be pardoned his first error; and for my part, I am quite satisfied, and feel no resentment for the slight inconvenience I suffered."

The Doge bowed.

"I requested a private audience," continued the Marquis, remarking that the Duke's eyes were fixed upon him with singular intensity in their expression, "purposely to speak to your Highness upon the subject of those gentlemen who have taken refuge under the banner of France. Your Highness is aware that Cardinal Mazarine has given me full power to accept or decline your offers, according to

my own judgment of their policy. Now, I will candidly state to you that I undertook the voyage and mission for the sole purpose of serving the Marchese d'Obizzi and the Count St. Felix. I knew they were imprisoned in the dungeons of San Marco. My Lord Cornaro," continued the Marquis, speaking firmly, and returning the fixed gaze of the Venetian Ruler, "I knew from experience, that once arrested, they had little chance of justice."

The Doge started, and his cheek paled, while his eyes flashed with some sudden thought, as he exclaimed—

"Your experience, my Lord Marquis—how is that? And yet, as I look upon you, and hear your voice, there comes over me a feeling of certainty that we have met before, but where I cannot say."

"Then I will refresh your Highness's memory," returned the Marquis, slowly, and with marked emphasis, provided that what I tell you remains shut up within your own breast. Have I your Highness's word that such shall be the case?"

“On my honour,” said the Doge, burning with a strange curiosity, “anything you communicate goes no further.”

“Then, my Lord Cornaro, I will tell you in few words: I am Balthazar Juven!”

At that name the Doge sprang to his feet, his features deadly pale, while his eyes roamed round the room, and his hand rested involuntarily on the jewelled dagger he wore within his richly decorated vest.

“Yes, my Lord, I am Balthazar Juven, who was three times stretched upon the rack by your orders, till fearful agony and torture forced a lie from my parched lips. I ought to have died on that cursed engine of torture sooner than have polluted my lips with a lie; but seventeen years of misery and slavery have, I trust, washed out that foul stain—the only one upon the honour of a French gentleman, a descendant of the noble family of Lesdiguières.”

The Doge sank back into his chair greatly agitated and amazed, the words “Balthazar Juven” escaping his lips several times. A

silence of some minutes took place, for both Doge and the Marquis were overcome with the recollection of the past; for true it was, that at the period mentioned by the Marquis des Lesdiguieres the Lord Cornaro was then one of the Inquisitors, and the most bitter enemy Balthazar Juven had at the time.

The Marquis had no hesitation in declaring to the Dôge his former name. He did not do so from any motive of revenge, seeking to wound the feelings of the Doge by recalling the cruel and unjust treatment he had received—treatment greatly aggravated by the stern, unrelenting disposition of Cornaro, whose love of applying torture to victims was well-known at that period.

“Now that your Highness knows who I really am, and the name I once bore, I told you, when you accused me of writing that letter, disclosing the names of the conspirators, in that unfortunate mysterious affair of Cueva, that I was innocent. I was no informer. The writer of that letter was Bertran de Trevisano. I was tortured till I was in-

duced to say I wrote it. However, that is past. After the taking of Khania, I escaped into France, when I succeeded to my present title, and the vast estates belonging to it.

“Now, my Lord Duke, I will tell you how this vastly important question between you and Cardinal Mazarine may be settled, and to your satisfaction. Grant a free pardon to the Marchese d’Obizzi and the Count St. Felix, or let them be publicly tried. They shall appear. I will abide the decision of the Council.”

Recovering himself to a certain degree, the Doge, though amazingly astounded, and eager to secure so favourable a treaty for Venice, said—

“My Lord Marquis, what is past is past, and no remedy can be applied. Venice at the time you speak of was on the brink of destruction. Nothing but the most rigorous means could have saved her. But let the past sleep; future ages may cavil at the acts committed at that terrible time, and Venetian Councillors denounced as cruel and monstrous tyrants. But our past glories speak for themselves, and the wisdom of her rulers.

Let us now turn to the question at issue between us. Your own experience tells you that it is a thing that rarely or ever occurs. Once a nobleman is arrested, condemnation in some shape is sure to follow.

“In the present excited state of Venice, a public trial of the Marchese d’Obizzi would be impolitic. But now that he is free, I will tell you, my Lord, what may and shall be done if it suits your views. A meeting of the Council shall take place in private, its decision shall be that the Marchese killed the Duke of Malamocco in fair duel. But that having provoked the contest, and disgraced the Duke’s high rank, by casting his body into a foul pool, from which it has never been recovered, the Marchese is condemned to five years exile from the Venetian territories, and also to a fine of one hundred thousand ducats to the State. As to the Count St. Felix, as an abettor and assistant, and for preventing assistance being afforded the Duke by his attendants, he will be forbidden to enter the territories of Venice during his life.”

“I will answer for him, my Lord,” returned the Marquis, with a smile, “that during his life will he ever enter your Highness’ territories. As for the Marchese, I will answer at once, and clear his honour; and I believe your Highness may extend his five years exile to fifty, so little love does he feel for a country that allowed his mother to be cruelly and brutally murdered, and with the clearest evidence, the villain being caught in the act, condemned to ten years’ imprisonment instead of death, which he merited ten times over, from the common hangman.”

“You speak bitterly, my Lord Marquis,” said the Doge with a flushed cheek, “perhaps did I not interfere, the whole of his estates and those he succeeds to—I mean the Brescian property—for the Council will not allow the claims of the young Marchese Luigi Fremessi—would be confiscated.”

“I do not quarrel, your Highness, with the terms you propose. A few days, I presume, will be allowed the Marchese d’Obizzi to settle his affairs, before going into banishment?”

“Certainly, my Lord Marquis, he shall be allowed a reasonable time. You will then sign the document for Cardinal Mazarine,” the Doge eagerly added—

“To-morrow, my Lord Duke, if you will—”

“Then to-morrow our judgment shall be made public, and the Marchese d’Obizzi and the Count St. Felix freed from restraint.”

“Be it so, your Highness. One thing I forgot to mention, which I think will materially assist your Highness in reconciling the Council to your *lenient sentence*.” The Marquis pronounced the last words with a mocked emphasis; but though the Doge’s cheek flushed, he made no remark, and the Marquis continued—

“As the Duke of Malamocco was slain by the Marchese d’Obizzi, no inducement would make him accept one ducat of the slain Duke’s property, neither would the young Marchese de Fremessi, even if his rights were allowed, take the estates.

“The unfortunate lady who passed for the late Duke’s wife, and her equally unfortunate

children, ought to be provided handsomely for out of the late Duke's property ; and both claimants are willing to resign their rights to the State, provided an ample and suitable provision is made for that lady and her children."

The Doge seemed moved by these words of the Marquis, for he eagerly said—

" My Lord, this conduct of the claimants is as noble as it is generous, and I feel satisfied, when laid before the Council, as it will be by me, a very different judgment will be given to-morrow."

" I thought as much," mentally ejaculated the French Envoy, with a curl of his lip, and rising, said aloud—

" Now, my Lord Duke, I will not detain you longer. Having happily settled the differences between your Government and his Eminence the Cardinal, I will sail for France in a few days."

" The Cardinal's name," said the Doge, " will be enrolled in the Golden Book, as a benefactor to Venice. But we shall meet again, my Lord Marquis, before your Excellency's departure."

CONCLUDING CHAPTER.

THE day after the Marquis des Lesdiguieres and the Doge of Venice held a conference in the Ducal Palace, Ferdinando d'Obizzi and the Count St. Felix were pacing the quarter-deck of the French galley, earnestly conversing. Their mail trunks had come aboard, and Stefano with them, bringing a letter from his Lord, requesting them to wait with patience the result of his second interview with the Doge.

"Now tell me, Francis," said the Marchese, "for I don't rightly comprehend our escape that night, and I feel greatly interested with respect to that fair young girl who so generously effected our liberation, and with whom you seemed so strangely intimate."

"Ah, Ferdinando, if you have the power, and we get out of this mess we are in, you must do something for that girl, and her worthy uncle and aunt. However, you will

understand me better if I begin at the beginning.

“When I was first thrust into that confounded narrow cell, Sotto Piombi, I was inclined to be desperate, and in fact was uncommonly riotous. My jailor was not the same as yours, the twenty-four cells were divided between two. My lot fell to the worthy Landre Castago, who resided with his wife and niece, Jubetta Barino, in very comfortable apartments on the same floor as the cells.

“Landre Castago was a kind and indulgent jailor, and he reasoned with me upon my violence and impatience. It appeared to me no joke to be confined in those cursed cells, Sotto Piombi, of which such horrible stories are told.

“‘When the sun shines,’ said I, ‘my friend and I shall be baked, or our brains fried.’

“‘Signore,’ he returned, ‘you are in error, the cells are cool and healthy, and your room has a fine view.’

“Well, I listened to his advice, and became

quiet, and then, as you know my disposition, I can never remain dull long, so I amused myself singing all my budget of songs, in which the god of love is introduced, according to custom, in every line. I flatter myself my voice is a good one. In truth the Venetian dames first spoiled me, extolling my voice to the skies. Jubetta heard my songs; she passionately loved music, and she often, without my knowing anything about it, listened outside. Presently I found my prison fare wonderfully improve, and after a time, my worthy jailor brought me a guitar and some books.

“‘By the saints,’ said I, ‘where do these come from?’ Old Castago smiled, saying—

“‘My niece, Jubetta, likes your singing, and poor little soul, she pities a caged bird.’

“Then I learned from the old man, that his niece was the orphan child of a rich goldbeater in Venice, and well brought up; that the death of her mother broke up the spirit and energy of her father, whose affairs went wrong, and bankruptcy followed; that Jubetta’s mother

was his sister, and that he took the poor girl, deserted and penniless, at the age of sixteen, to live with him ; that his salary was a good one, and he had many privileges, and all the prisoners under his care suffered as little as possible.

“ I asked where you were. He told me, and informed me that your jailor, though a sullen, silent man, was not a harsh one ; that the prisons were regularly inspected once a month by one of the great Inquisitors, but not the cells.

“ Well, Ferdinando, to shorten my story, I prevailed on the old man to let me enjoy a walk at night on the terrace, to breathe a little more air than my cell afforded. I sometimes also sat with him, and his wife and Jubetta in their room for half-an-hour or so. I saw Jubetta, but, on my sacred honour, no word ever passed my lips, when conversing with her, except expressions of gratitude for the kindness I received. I never sang or played out of my own cell, for the sound would be heard. Kind old Dame Castago would,

for half-an-hour sometimes, bring Jubetta to my cell, and sit and listen to some of my gay songs—and occasionally they were sad songs enough, for my humour was not always gay. I told them part of our story and adventures, enough to interest them, and as it turned out it did interest Jubetta.

“ One evening she contrived to drop a paper on my table unperceived by her aunt. I saw it, and on reading it was startled—

“ ‘ Signore, we are to be removed, and another jailor appointed. There is some cruel plot against you and your friend. If I can save you, without any blame being attached to my kind uncle and aunt, I will. Burn this.

‘ JUBETTA.’

“ This spoiled my singing. I saw the kind jailor or Jubetta no more. In this state of uneasiness I remained three days, when in breaking a loaf of bread, the same way as you received your false note, I received one from Jubetta. It was as follows—

“ ‘ I have contrived to overhear the whole

plot against you and your friend, who is led to believe that friends are going to assist in his escape this night; instead of escape you are both to be seized in a certain passage, gagged, and conveyed to the horrible dungeons beneath the Canals. When the jailor enters your cell to-night with your friend, seize him and gag him, and trust to me. I will be on the spot; but in the name of all the saints, I implore you do not hurt him, or make any noise.

‘JUBETTA.’

“You know the rest. I have nothing more to say, except to bless the dear girl for her generous interference in our behalf.”

“We may be thankful to Providence, and to her noble and kind heart,” said the Marchese, for otherwise we should be now pining in that accursed vault, where so many have perished.”

“What boat is that pulling with such velocity towards the galley? Ha! I see Luigi Fremessi in the stern sheets, waving his plumed beaver.”

In a few minutes the boat was alongside and Luigi sprung up the side, his handsome features

flushed with excitement and joy ; as he pressed with fervour the extended hands of the friends, he said in a voice of exultation —

“The Marquis des Lesdiguieres has permitted me to precede him with the news. You are both free ! The Council has pronounced judgment on your case.”

“This is indeed news,” cried St. Felix. “But what is the judgment, Luigi ?” while Captain de la Rue and several officers crowded eagerly but respectfully round the speakers.

“That, my Lord,” said Luigi, “he reserves for himself to tell you. There comes the Envoy’s state barge from the Piazzetta.”

Propelled by eight oarsmen in the gorgeous livery of the Doge, the barge came rapidly onward, the standard of France waving over her stern. Immediately, by an order from Captain de la Rue, the lofty latine yards of the galley were crossed and covered in a minute by the crew ; while the gunners hastened to their guns, and as the barge ranged up alongside, the thundering roar of the heavy guns of the galley were borne across the Lagune and

awaked a hundred echoes from the walls of the Ducal Palace and the lofty buildings adjoining. As the sound died away, and the French Envoy reached the quarter deck, a simultaneous cheer burst from the throats of the crew on the yards, a faint imitation of that hearty cheer that thunders over the deep from British sailors, who alone know how to cheer.

In the cabin of the galley, the Marquis des Lesdiguières repeatedly embraced his friends, and for several minutes not a word was spoken beyond those of congratulation and pleasure at their meeting.

“Now, my young friends,” said the French Envoy, “you must be anxious to know the result of my interview with his Highness the Doge.”

The Marquis then related to the two friends the result of his first interview with the Duke Cornaro.

“This morning,” continued the Marquis des Lesdiguières, “I received a letter from the Doge requesting a private interview at the Ducal Palace. Accordingly, I proceeded

thither, unattended, and was received by the Doge with great cordiality.

“‘My Lord Marquis,’ said the Duke, ‘we sat to a late hour last night, consulting on the subject in which you are so interested. I think the judgment the Council have agreed to pronounce will meet your views, and not be found fault with by the Marchese d’Obizzi and the Count St. Felix. The opinion of the Council, is—

“‘That the fatal encounter between the late Duke of Malamocco and the Marchese d’Obizzi was strictly honourable on the part of the Marchese, and that the act of the Count St. Felix, though he might have prevented the final catastrophe, that of hurling the body into the pool, was yet only what one friend would do in strict justice for another. But that having been arrested, their breaking out of confinement and effecting their escape, before their trial could take place—’”

“*Parblieu*, my Lord,” interrupted the Count with a laugh, “that is a farce ; if—”

“Patience, patience, *mon ami*,” said the

Marquis with a smile. "I know it ; but when the lion's paw is on you, it is best to wait quietly till he finds it convenient to remove it, for to struggle with the king of the forest would be death, and the Lion of St. Mark, though winged, is by no means of celestial origin."

"'It is necessary,' continued the Doge, 'that the dignity of the State should not be compromised. Therefore the Marchese and the Count will be expected to retire into honourable exile in any part of the Venetian territories they please, Venice excepted, for a period of five years, and that both the Marchese d'Obizzi and Luigi Fremessi resign all claim to the Brescian property, out of which a handsome pension will be made for the unfortunate lady, and her children, known as the Duchess of Malamocco.'

"'Such my Lord Marquis, are the only terms I could succeed in obtaining from the three Inquisitors of State. Do they meet your Excellency's approbation?'"

"Now, my dear Marchese," continued the

French Envoy, "as I knew you cared but little for a residence in Venice, and the Count St. Felix not at all; and knowing also your resolve, and that of my young friend opposite, with respect to the Duke's property, I acceded at once to the judgment of the Inquisitors. The Doge seemed highly pleased, and then said—

"‘My Lord, I may say to you in confidence, that this species of exile is a mere matter of form; before a year expires, the sentence will be revoked.’

"What passed between us afterwards had reference to the political question I came to settle, and to which I found no difficulty in agreeing. I shall now be quite ready to sail for France in three days at the furthest; I may therefore say, my mission has turned out most fortunately. Now, all you have to do is to accompany me to your own palace, where you may expect a joyful welcome; for many an anxious hour has been passed, filled with apprehension and dread, since my entrance

into this fair but false city of the Lagunes, by the females of my family."

It was on the fifteenth of May that the "Henri Quatre," the war galley of France, with all the canvas set, her silken banner flaunting gaily in the breeze that was to bear her from the Lagunes of Venice, received aboard the French Envoy, his family and suite. The cannon thundered from the arsenal walls in honour of France, and the guns of the "Henri Quatre," thundered in reply in honour of the Winged Lion of St. Mark.

The sails fell from the lofty yards and swelled out to the glorious breeze; a blaze of sunshine shone on palace and tower, upon pinnacle and spire, upon myriads of boats of all kinds of rig, filled with their owners, eager to behold the departure of the French galley and those aboard her.

The exiles did not leave, without the blessings and kind wishes of many from the palace windows in the Piazzetta. The Signore Grimani and his daughter Bianca gazed

anxiously on the deck of the vessel ; and the quick eye of the daughter rested on more than one noble form, each with a fair and beautiful girl leaning on his arm, walking the quarter-deck, stopping at times and gazing upon the city they were perhaps leaving for ever.

From the summit of the Ducal Palace, standing on a leaden terrace, were three persons, looking down upon the scene before them. They were an elderly couple and a fair young girl, whose eyes were moist with tears.

“He was a noble Signore,” said the worthy jailor, Castago, “and, thanks to the Saints, he has escaped. But why he and his friend should have so nobly recompensed us for the trifling service we did the Count St. Felix, in showing him some indulgence, puzzles me greatly. Jubetta, dearest, why do you weep? We will quit this dismal abode, now I have obtained leave, and will, with the princely present these noble Signores have made me, go into some quiet country residence. Your bloom will there come back to you.”

Jubetta sighed.

“You said you would tell me, dear child,” said the old dame, “something about this strange escape of the two Signorese. It is very mysterious; and how you learned anything about it, I cannot think.”

“I will tell you, aunt,” returned Jubetta in a low voice, “when we get out of Venice. Ah! the galley fades away in the distance. May they be happy!”

On the deck of the galley, Ferdinando d'Obizzi stood, with the young and lovely Justina Lesdiguieres leaning on his arm, and gazing up with those lustrous eyes full of love and joy into the somewhat pensive features of her noble lover.

“Ferdinando,” said the maiden in her low, soft voice, “you look a little sad. Do you regret leaving the land of your parents?”

“Regret, beloved one,” returned the Marchese with a start, and with a look of intense affection fixed upon the lovely being who leaned upon his arm—“Regret, and you, Justina, beside me, to gain whose love I would forfeit birthright, fatherland and wealth. No,

I have obtained far more than I merited or deserved. I looked for the moment sad, when my eyes rested on yonder stately pile, the Palace of St. Mark, for a chill crept over me, as the thought rushed through my brain, on what a mere chance my felicity in life depended the night when Felix and I escaped from the very window my eyes were fixed upon, when you observed the change in my features. No, dearest, no regret have I in leaving a city whose very sight recalls to me so many painful and bitter recollections. We will purchase an estate in your fair Provence, near your father's, and henceforth, trusting the Providence that has so beneficently brought me through such trials, will forgive that *Rash Vow*, in fulfilling which I might only have plunged myself and others into sorrow and misery for the remainder of life."

Seated on a low chair, near the stern of the galley was Leta Fremessi, and leaning over the arm of the chair, looking into the blue eyes of the joyous looking maiden was Francis St. Felix ; and strange to say, the gay Count was,

as he gazed back a moment upon the City of the Waters, for once looking serious. Gay, blooming and innocent Leta appeared one of those fair beings, whose light, guileless heart, thought of the past without pain, and also looked into futurity without anxiety, and to whom sorrow and care were unknown. Francis St Felix won her first and only love, and in him was centred all her thoughts and felicity.

“Come, confess, Count ; it will do you good ! Confess you are looking serious at quitting all the fair bright eyes that have agitated that inconstant heart of yours in yonder proud city ; and lamenting that one little heart has thrown its meshes around the gay Count St. Felix. How many fair ones are now sighing over your cruel departure ? Now, be honest.”

“Well, upon the honour of a French cavalier,” returned the Count, with a look of delight at the bright, sunny glance meeting his, “they are past counting ; but as you have given me absolution for the past, I have faithfully sworn to look upon no other paradise than those sweet eyes of yours for the future.”

"Ah," returned the maiden, "I fear to trust you. I think that story of yours about the *old* woman that planned your escape, out of compassion, is rather a doubtful one. I overheard Luigi, when talking to that handsome Signora, Bianca Grimani, with whom he is so desperately enamoured, and who, by the by, I heard was once greatly admired by a certain French Count—"

"The deuce!" said the Count, laughing, and interrupting her. "Why, Leta, you have not been idle during your stay in Venice, though shut up in the Palazzo d'Obizzi."

"Oh, that is the very best way possible of gaining information, Count. When you shut up us women, we are doubly anxious to know what is going on without. But you forget that this fair daughter of the Lawyer visited us every day, till the gay young Count St. Felix escaped the paws of the Winged Lion. Bianca told me everything about yourself, as she considered herself betrothed to Luigi, if after a year's service in the army he returns and claims her hand. Her father, you know, has gained

us our inheritance and intends quitting Venice and is going to live in Milan, and my dear old grandmother goes with them, and the little Savoyard boy, the protégé of the Marchese, and who, in fact, saved his life by the information he gave him. So you see, we may pick up a great deal of information even when shut up in a palace."

On flew the galley of France over the light short waves of the Lagunes ; the Ledo was soon passed ; as the setting sun, like a globe of fire, cast over the broader waters of the Adriatic its glorious beams, touching tower and pinnacle on the Ledo with a gleam of gold—heaven and sea appeared blended into one magnificent amphitheatre of mingled hues of fire, azure, and gold.

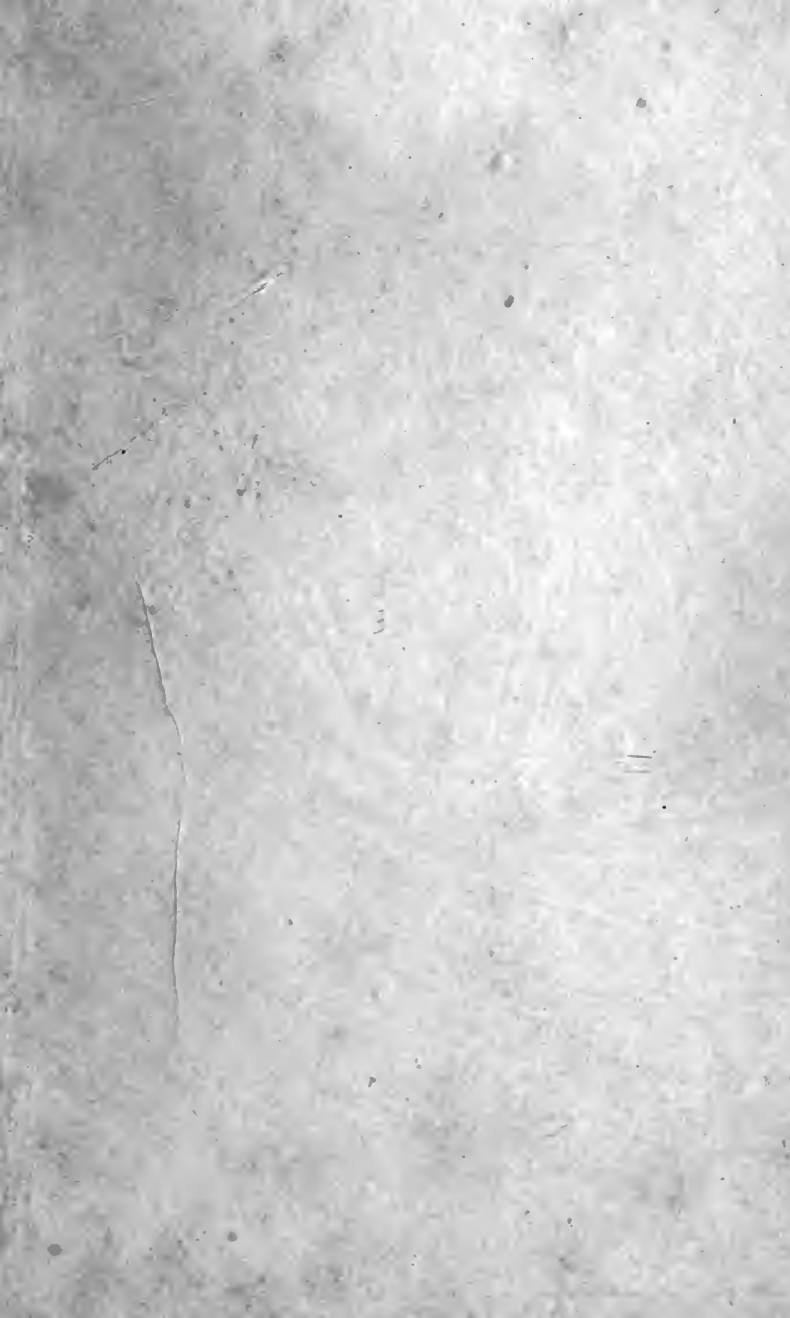
"Ah!" said the Marquis des Lesdiguieres, his fond wife's hand in his, "this time, I trust, I lose sight of the City of the Waters for ever."

THE END.









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